The Situatedness of Practices and Knowledge: Studies on the adoption of pro-social practices and academic knowledge

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The Faculty of Economics, Business Administration and Information Technology of the University of Zurich hereby authorizes the printing of this dissertation, without indicating an opinion of the views expressed in the work.

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1 Introduction

Tout ce qui existe est situé.

Max Jacob, Preface to A Dice Cup (1916)

She looked up at him, and her eyes were sparkling,
her lips moist and tender. She was a beautiful woman in that moment,
truly beautiful, filled with the beauty that only comes to a women
in one or two perfect moments in a lifetime, and to most not at all.

William Alfred McKinley III, *French Girl (1973)*

In this thesis, I take an interpretive approach to the situatedness of organizational practices and knowledge to study their adoption. From an interpretive perspective, situatedness is not an objective phenomenon, but situations, i.e. “concrete places at specific times" (Czarniawska, 2001: 254) are socially constructed "under the constraints present in those times and places” (ibid.) . In this view, studying organizational phenomena foregrounds the situatedness of social action and knowledge as they are the main “subjects” of social construction in organizational contexts (Brown & Duguid, 1991; Cook & Brown, 1999). In this sense, the thesis focuses on the situatedness of knowledge, i.e. the "individual capability" (Tsoukas & Vladimirou, 2001: 971) to enact "experiences [...], contextual information, and expert insight that provides a framework for evaluating and incorporating new experiences and information" (Davenport & Prusak, 1998: 5) as well as practices, i.e., the socially shaped activities of human actors (Bourdieu, 1977). Because of their situatedness, knowledge and practices are meaningful to a particular context and can thus not be directly transferred from one context to another. Against this background, this thesis examines the adoption of situated organizational knowledge and practices.

The remainder of this chapter is structured into six sections. First, I review the conceptualizations of situatedness of "systemic-discursive" theories and of theories of social practices as the main schools of thought of the interpretive approaches to situatedness. In the second section, I draw on studies on the adoption of organizational knowledge and practices to show the implications of situatedness. In the third section, I discuss how the studies of this

thesis relate to the situatedness and adoption of organizational knowledge and practices. In the fourth section, I summarize each of the three studies, and in the fifth section, I delineate their major contributions. The chapter concludes with specifying avenues for future research.

1.1 Situatedness

Organization studies have a long-standing tradition in studying the situatedness of organizational phenomena. The idea that organizations provide a context and are themselves embedded in an outside world has already been depicted, for example, in the contingency theory, developed in the 1950s. Criticizing previous organization theories, such as Weber's theory of bureaucracy (1947), for ignoring the influence of the environment on organizational structures and management style, adherents of contingency theory argued that the best way of organizing is contingent upon the internal context of an organization and its situatedness in the external environment (Thompson, 1967; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1969).

By examining the contingencies that determine which organizational structure is most efficient for the functioning of an organization in a given situation, such as technology, consumer and supplier relations, contingency theory, like other functionalist organization theories (Burrell & Morgan, 1979), conceptualizes situatedness as an objective phenomenon to which the organizational structures, i.e. organizational knowledge and practices, have to be adapted. However, this conceptualization has been criticized for disregarding the interpretive nature of situatedness (e.g. Benson, 1977). From an interpretive perspective, contingent or contextual factors do not exist objectively but are socially constructed (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). In this sense, it is not the situatedness of an organization as such that matters but the meaning that is attached to a situation by those actors, institutions or organizations affected by the situation.

These assumptions about the ontological nature of situatedness are mainly reflected in organization studies drawing on the constructivist approach of "systemic-discursive" theories (Astley, W. Graham & Zammuto, 1992; Hendry & Seidl, 2003; Seidl, 2007; Seidl & Becker, 2006; Zbaracki, 1998) and on the culture-theoretical approach of theories of social practices (e.g. (Hendry, 2000; Jarzabkowski, 2005; Miettinen, Paavola, & Pohjola, 2012; Orlikowski, 2000; Whittington, 2006). Although systemic-discursive theories and theories of social practices share the view that social action and knowledge are interpreted according to the

“situation” in which they are enacted they differ in their view on the “texture” of situatedness, the analytic level of situatedness and the role of agency in the formation of situatedness.

While systemic-discursive theories, such as those developed by Wittgenstein, Lyotard and Luhmann[1], have different theoretical underpinnings, they share the idea that social action and the knowledge inherent in these actions (conceptualized as communication, speech acts and phrases) are bound up with the specific social context (conceptualized as communication system, language game or genres) in which they are embedded. Following Wittgenstein (1953), the situatedness of social events refers to different linguistic contexts that he calls "language games", which condition the ways humans act and experience the world. Different language games contain particular conventions or rules that pertain how we communicate but also how we behave and act. Depending on the particular language game in which humans take part, social events are experienced differently. Thus, understandings of social actions and the knowledge are determined by particular language games. In other words, the conventions of a particular language game define the particular meaning of words, knowledge and actions in which they are used. They cannot be understood independently of the language game in which they are used. Where Wittgenstein speaks of speech acts that are intentionally produced by subjects, Lyotard (1988) speaks of "phrases" whose meaning is not "given through the intention of a speaker but through the context of other phrases in which it becomes embedded" (Seidl, 2007: 200). Similarly to Wittgenstein's language games, Lyotard talked about "genres" that obtain different rules for linking phrases. In contrast to language games however, genres are incommensurable as there are no rules for linking phrases across different genres. A similar line of reasoning is taken up by Luhmann (1995) with his concept of autopoietic, i.e. self-reproducing, communication systems or networks of communication. Every communication, i.e. "the unity of utterance, information and understanding" (Seidl, 2007: 201) is produced by a particular communication system and cannot enter other communication systems. Communication can be triggered by other communication systems but it will be produced according to the internal logic of the communication system to which the communication belongs.

Despite the different theoretical underpinnings of these systemic-discursive approaches, Wittgenstein, Lyotard and Luhmann regard situatedness in terms of multiple discursive

[1] While some scholars would argue that Luhmann's system theory is a functionalist theory, it has been shown that the functionalist aspects of his theory have been turned into a method (Seidl and Mohrmann, 2014) .

contexts (conceptualized as language games, communication systems or genres), each with a different internal logic that affects the meaning of social action (conceptualized as communication, speech acts and phrases). According to Lyotard and Luhmann, these discursive contexts are operatively closed or incommensurable, i.e. no speech act (or communication) can be transferred from one context to another as each speech act has a particular meaning in a context and thus constitutes a different speech act.

In line with systemic-discursive theories, theories of social practice, such as those developed by Pierre Bourdieu and Anthony Giddens (who rank among the main practice theorists), share the idea that human action is situated in specific social contexts (conceptualized as social systems or social fields). In this sense, society is composed of different social contexts that impact meaning on knowledge and social action. Yet, in contrast to the systemic-discursive approaches of Lyotard and Luhmann, different social contexts are not treated as "operatively closed" systems (Kieser & Leiner, 2009; Seidl, 2009) but as semiautonomous or permeable contexts. From a systemic-discursive perspective, actions are part of a social context because they function according to the logic of this context. From a practice-theoretical point of view, actions function according to the logic of practice, which is homologous across social contexts. Hence, all social contexts share the same underlying logic but they differ in the particular structures, in which knowledge and social practices are situated.

Giddens refers to structures in terms of "rules and resources", i.e. "the structuring properties of social systems" (Giddens, 1984: 17), which condition the way humans act. He defines rules as "generalized procedures applied in the enactment of social life" (Giddens, 1984: 7), e.g. a dress code or incest taboos; and resources as allocative power, i.e. power over things, like economic resources, and authoritative power, i.e. power over actors, like knowledge resources. Rules are needed to activate resources and are only observable in the enactment of resources. Social structures, i.e. rules and resources, allow actors to exercise power and to legitimize actions but also define the meaning of social action in which rules and resources are used. For Giddens, structures are located in human minds but only "exist" in the generating moment of the "instantiation" of social practices (Walsham, 2002).

Similarly to Giddens, Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1977) argues that social structures give rise to socially shared interests, beliefs and assumptions that enable and constrain social practices. In other words, depending on the social field in which actors enact their practices, they are faced

with different structural possibilities and constraints, i.e. they are guided by field-specific interests, beliefs and assumptions. This implies that even if the same individuals participate in different spheres they cannot transfer meaning from one sphere to another because moving from one field to another implies a shift in the meaning of the structural conditions of their actions.

In addition, Bourdieu (2001) refers to the concept of "illusio" of the social fields to describe actors' unconsciously shared recognition of interest, beliefs and assumptions. Thus, illusio allows members of one field to share an understanding that makes the practices of other actors in the field meaningful and deemed appropriate. By acknowledging specific interests, beliefs and assumptions, illusio provides actors with incorporated, generalized perceptions (conceptualized as habitus) to assign meaning to other agents' actions. Consequently, all practices receive their specific meanings from being enacted in that particular field. In other words, social actions are only meaningful in relation to a particular social field.

In contrast to Giddens' more narrowly conceived notion of social structures (Sewell Jr, William H, 1992; Stones, 2005), Bourdieu (1977) conceptualizes social structures as power relations among actors. Thus, social practices are situated in social structures that reflect the current power relations among actors. From a Bourdieusian point of view social contexts, conceptualized as social fields, are composed of power structures, because resources, conceptualized as different forms of "capital" (like monetary assets, knowledge and social networks) are unequally distributed in society. Thus, in contrast to Giddens, capital do not constitute the social structure as such. The differentiation between structures and resources allows Bourdieu to differentiate between dominant and dominated actors, whose actions are directed at acquiring capital and thus increasing or maintaining the power position in a social field. As dominant actors are able to unconsciously define the rules according to which the pursued capital is conducted and thus, the struggle for power is played out, the Bourdieusian approach allows to explain that structures "operate differently, affecting unevenly various groups of individuals [within one field] whose categorization depends on certain assumption about social structures" (Thompson, 1984: 159). This implies that although actors' practices are situated in a social field, this situatedness unevenly affects actors' knowledge and practices.

Both the social practice theory of Giddens and Bourdieu assume situatedness in terms of multiple social contexts (conceptualized as social system or social field) each with a different social structure that affects the meaning of social action (conceptualized as social practice). Even though theories of social practice focus on the situatedness of social action, they do not disregard the situatedness of language as "saying is a kind of doing" (Seidl & Whittington, 2014: 8)[2]. However, in contrast to the systemic-discursive theories of Luhmann and Lyotard, theories of social practice share the view that not all human action is reducible to communication and speech acts. Moreover, in contrast to systemic-discursive theories, both theories of social practice consider the recursive relation between structure and agency (conceptualized as duality of structure or praxeology). Practices are situated in social spheres, which give rise to particular structures that are guiding rules for human action. However, structures do not only shape social practices but are also the outcome of these practices. As Giddens describes "society only has form, and that form only has effects on people, insofar as structure is produced and reproduced in what people do" (Giddens, 1984: 157). Thus, unlike Althusser's notion of agents as "Träger" (the bearer or carrier) of structures, agents are active - but unconscious - producers of social structures. Hence, from a practice theoretical perspective the situatedness is not abstracted from human action but necessarily comprises both structure and agency. While disregarding the focus of systemic-discursive theories on detached structures, which lack regard for agency, theories of social practice equally deny subjectivism's exclusive attention to individual agency without consideration of the socio-structural context. In this sense, the socio-structural context is not a "mechanical outcome, [but rather] an active constituting process, accomplished by, and consisting in, the doings of active subjects" (Giddens, 1993: 121).

Despite their different conceptualizations of situatedness, systemic-discursive theories, and theories of social practice share the view that social spheres (conceptualized as language game, communication system, social system and social field) give rise to different meaning systems (conceptualized as rules and conventions, logic, social structure or illusio) according to which actions and knowledge (conceptualized as communication, speech act or social practice) are interpreted. Although systemic-discursive theories and theories of social practices view all knowledge and actions as situated, this dissertation focuses on the situatedness of knowledge and practices related to organizational phenomena. Situatedness

[2] Seidl & Whittington (2014) also note that theories of social practice can be differentiated by the extent to which they stress "doings or sayings" (Schatzki, 2002). The Bourdieusian theory of social practice, for example, focuses on the doings rather than the sayings, or discursive aspects of practices.

can thus be conceptualized as the embeddedness of organizational practices and management knowledge in an organizational sphere that determines their meaning. Within the scope of this thesis, an organizational sphere extends a single organization's boundary and may include all actors who play a role in light of a particular organizational phenomenon.

The situatedness of organizational practices and knowledge within organizational fields does not imply that spheres are closed off from the external world. Organizational spheres might be affected by knowledge and practices from other social spheres, such as other organizational spheres, or the broader social spheres of education or science. In contrast to a functionalist view (Prahalad & Hamel, 1990; Szulanski, 2000; Winter, 1998), knowledge and practices from one sphere cannot easily be transferred to another sphere as knowledge and practices are only meaningful in a particular organizational sphere. In this sense, organizational spheres have to be treated as different contexts between which a direct transfer of meaning is impossible. Thus, the situatedness of knowledge and practices has important implications for the ways in which organizational spheres can be influenced by other spheres and their respective environment.

1.2 Adoption

Several studies have discussed the implications of the situatedness of organizational knowledge and practices on their adoption[3]. Drawing on the conceptualization of different organizational spheres, they argue that the meaning of knowledge and practices inevitably changes as a consequence of being adopted by a new context (Jarzabkowski, 2005; Jarzabkowski & Wilson, 2006; Orlikowski, 2000; Rasche & Behnam, 2009; Seidl, 2007, 2009). Knowledge and practices developed in one sphere can stimulate other spheres, but this knowledge and these practices will be understood differently because knowledge and practices have different meanings in different organizational spheres. Thus, when knowledge and practices are adopted to organizational contexts they are subject to translation, editing or reinterpretation (Czarniawska & Sevón, 1996; Geertz, 1977; Sahlin & Wedlin, 2008; Seidl, 2007), i.e. subject to a change of meaning.

[3] It is not within the scope of this introduction to discuss the implications of the different conceptualizations of situatedness on the adoption of knowledge and practices. Therefore, I will refer to the studies that draw on systemic-discursive theories and theories of social practice to discuss the adoption of knowledge and practices in general.

Seidl (2007: 206) calls this phenomenon "productive misunderstanding", meaning that knowledge and practices from other spheres are used "as an external provocation to create internally something new". Knowledge and practices are reconstructed according to the meaning system or logic of an organizational sphere. However, this internal reconstruction is different from the original knowledge or practice (Seidl, 2007; Astley & Zammuto, 1992). In other words, actors in one sphere try to make sense of new knowledge or practices on the basis of existing social structures, thereby creating new meaning. To adopt is then not just to imitate but also to change and innovate as meanings evolve differently in different settings (Czarniawska & Sévon, 1996). Hence, in different contexts, organizational practices and knowledge have to be treated as different organizational practices and knowledge. This implies that the knowledge and practices in one organizational context are never identical with knowledge and practices in another organizational context even though "different organizations might use the same labels [for knowledge and practice], but the concrete practices behind the labels are different" (Seidl, 2007: 206).

In addition, the situatedness of organizational knowledge and practices implies that they do not "diffuse in a vacuum but are actively transferred and translated in a context of other knowledge, practices, actors, traditions and institutions" (Sahlin & Wedlin, 2008: 219). Because knowledge and practices are interpreted in the context in which they are situated, they will be transformed, adapted or changed according to the principles and conventions that the adopting context holds in stock. Thus, the particular ways in which organizational knowledge and practices will be transformed or changed is ultimately determined by the adopting context itself. However, these particular ways are not completely random. Rather, the range of possible meanings of knowledge and practices is restricted by the adopting organizational sphere (Sahlin-Andersson, 1996; Seidl, 2007).

In contrast to an instrumental view on adoption, which assumes that the more powerful and efficient knowledge and practices are the more organizations adopt them, the situatedness of organizational knowledge and practices calls into question that there are intrinsic factors to practices and knowledge that will contribute to its adoption (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996). Thus, it is not a question of the properties of organizational knowledge and practices as such whether they will be adopted but whether they can be meaningfully adapted to the structure or logic of the adopting organizational sphere. Thus, the adoption of knowledge and practices is

only possible if there is a point of reference between the knowledge or practice and the adopting sphere (or more specifically, the frame of reference of the actors who enact a practice in the adopting sphere). In this sense, it has been shown that the reasons to adopt organizational knowledge and practices depends on the degree to which they resonate with the assumptions of organizational members and conform to their interests (Beyer & Trice, 1982; Nicolai & Dautwiz, 2010). In the case of the adoption of knowledge, the ambiguity of knowledge can increases the chance of being adopted because the plurality of meanings of knowledge allows a wide variety of interpretations in light of the respective context to which knowledge is adopted (Nicolai & Dautwitz, 2010; Astley & Zammuto, 1992).

1.3 Adoption of CSR practices and academic knowledge

Against this backdrop, this dissertation draws on different conceptualizations of situatedness of knowledge and practices to study the adoption of a particular kind of social practice, namely pro-social practices (first study), and a particular type of knowledge, namely academic knowledge (second and third study). The first two studies are based on the practice theory of Bourdieu, while the third study is based on the above-mentioned literature on the adoption of knowledge and practices. The aim of this dissertation is to examine the conditions, i.e. the socially shaped causes of actors' thinking and acting (Merton, 1968), and the mechanisms, i.e. the "cogs and wheels" that generate social relationships (Elster, 1989: 3, cited in Hedström & Swedberg, 1996), that explain[4] how management practitioners adopt pro-social practices and academic knowledge.

The first study of this dissertation focuses on the adoption of pro-social practices, i.e. the socially shaped activities of corporate actors that address social and ethical values beyond legal requirements. Corporations face a dramatic rise in the concern for corporate social responsibility (CSR), which has been well documented in the academic literature (Carroll & Shabana, 2010; Crane, Andrew, Dirk Matten, and Jeremy Moon., 2008; Palazzo & Scherer, 2008; Scherer & Palazzo, 2011; Vogel, 2010). In this sense, pro-social practices lend themselves particularly well to the study of the adoption of organizational practices. This study draws on the practice theory of Bourdieu, which is particularly suited to study the

[4] In this thesis, I refer to the hermeneutic tradition of "explaining", which accounts for the subjectivity of the research "object" by trying to comprehend actors' social construction and the meanings of their actions and knowledge (Scherer (2003)).

adoption of pro-social practices for two reasons. First, in contrast to prevalent theoretical approaches to CSR that focus either on the micro-level of analysis (such as the economic approach or managerial utility approach) or on the macro-level of analysis (such as the resource-based view or the institutionalist approach) to explain the adoption of pro-social behaviour, the Bourdieusian approach allows researchers to grasp the link between micro-and macro level of analysis by conceptualizing pro-social behaviour as a form of social practice that is shaped by broader societal structures and individual perceptions. Second, the Bourdieusian approach allows researchers to explore an unexplored aspect of the adoption of pro-social practices, namely, the interplay between different types of motivation for the adoption of practices. From a Bourdieusian perspective, pro-social practices are enacted by individual managers in their efforts to attain economic, social and cultural (e.g. knowledge) capital.

The second and third study of this dissertation examine the adoption of academic management knowledge by management practitioners. According to these studies, academic management knowledge can be defined as statements for which an explanation exists that has been methodically approved by management science[5] (Schreyogg & Geiger, 2003), The adoption of academic management knowledge by management practice as an applied science has fuelled a long-standing debate in the academic literature (Gopinath & Hoffman, 1995; Jarzabkowski, Mohrman, & Scherer, 2010). In this dissertation, two particular aspects of this debate are further examined. The second study explores the epistemological consequences of the situatedness of academic knowledge for its adoption by management practitioners. As management research can be said to generate knowledge by observing practice to inform or improve practice (Cheng & McKinley, 1983), it is of particular concern to examine the way in which scholars can generate[6] academic knowledge that will be adopted by management practice. To account for the situatedness of academic knowledge within the academic system, this study draws on the practice-theoretical approach of Bourdieu. In contrast to the first study, this second study mainly draws on Bourdieu's concepts of social field and participant objectivation (a particular form of reflexivity) to elaborate how the situatedness of knowledge

[5] As organizational scholars do not share a common understanding of what constitutes valid academic knowledge, they do not agree upon the method according to which explanations are validated (Scherer, 2003). Academic knowledge differs from lay or practical knowledge in the criteria according to which knowledge is validated but not in the requirement of a method as such (Schreyögg & Geiger, 2003).

[6] As scholars "are also practitioners - of scholarly pursuit" (Jarzabkowski, Mohrman, Scherer, 2010: 1196), "generating academic knowledge" can be conceptualized as a socially shaped activity, i.e. a social practice.

can be taken into account in the production of knowledge in order to make it meaningful to another context (i.e., management practice). The Bourdieusian approach lends itself particularly well to study the adoption of knowledge as Bourdieu himself applied his theory to the field of social science (Bourdieu, 1988, 2004). However, the implications of this application for the adoption of academic management knowledge by management practitioners have not been systematically explored.

While the third study also examines the adoption of academic management knowledge, it takes another angle on the debate by examining the conditions under which individual managers consider academic knowledge as worth adopting to their concrete organizational contexts. To account for management practitioners' situatedness, in terms of their professional organizational contexts and previously acquired knowledge, this study draws on a qualitative method (Langley & Abdallah, 2011; Patton, 2005b) to examine practitioners' construction of practical relevance. A qualitative method is well suited to study the situative conditions under which practitioners consider academic management knowledge as worth adopting to their organizational contexts because it allows to capture actors' perceptions and interpretations (Maitlis, 2005a; Silverman, 2006). This study shows that managers consider academic knowledge as worth adopting, if it resonates with their particular organizational context, extends their situated knowledge and is considered valuable for their organizational contexts and professional practices.

Each of the three studies of this dissertation foregrounds a particular aspect of situatedness and thus offers a different answer to the overarching question of how management practitioners adopt academic management knowledge and pro-social practices. The first study discusses the mechanisms through which management practitioners adopt pro-social practices within organizational spheres. It shows that the adoption of pro-social practices depends on the features of the particular organizational sphere, but also on management practitioners' situated dispositions and stock of capital. The second study discusses the implications of the knowledge generated in the academic sphere for its adoption by management practitioners. This study demonstrates that academic knowledge production, which takes the situatedness of knowledge into account, fosters the adoption of academic management knowledge by management practitioners. The third study discusses the conditions under which management practitioners consider knowledge generated in the academic sphere as worth adopting. It shows that if management practitioners match academic knowledge against their contexts and

situated knowledge, extend their knowledge by academic management knowledge and consider it as valuable for their contexts and practices, they consider it as worth adopting it. In sum, this dissertation draws on different conceptualizations of the situatedness of knowledge and practices to unravel the conditions under which and the mechanisms with which academic management knowledge and pro-social practices are adopted by management practitioners.

1.4 Summary of Studies

The first study, a conceptual work, co-authored with Dominik van Aaken and David Seidl, is published in the Journal Organization. In this study, we draw on the practice theory of Pierre Bourdieu to examine why corporate actors adopt pro-social behaviour. We focus on pro-social practices because corporations face a dramatic rise in the concern for corporate social responsibility (CSR) (Caroll, 2008; Vogel, 2005; Palazzo & Scherer, 2008). Despite the pervasiveness of pro-social behaviour, the motivations to adopt pro-social practices are not fully understood. Most theoretical approaches to CSR focus either on the economic motivations (McWilliams and Siegel, 2001), the non-economic motivations (Scherer and Palazzo, 2011) or different types of motivation simultaneously (Hemingway and Maclagan, 2004; Campbell, 2007), disregarding the *interplay* between economic and non-economic motivations to adopt pro-social practices.

Applying a Bourdieusian perspective to study the motivations to adopt CSR practices, we show that pro-social practices are influenced by the interplay of economic, social, cultural and symbolic elements. We refer to pro-social practices as socially shaped activities that address social and ethical values beyond legal requirements. The study shows that the enactment of pro-social practices depends on the features of the particular organizational field, in which the pro-social practice is enacted, the social dispositions of individual managers who enact the pro-social practices and their stock and quest for (economic, social, cultural and symbolic) capital for which actors in a field compete to attain power. Combining these theoretical concepts, the Bourdieusian perspective on CSR reveals the mechanisms through which the economic and non-economic motivations interrelate and change over time. In addition, a Bourdieusian perspective takes into account various influences on the micro- and macro-level, as well as deterministic and voluntaristic aspects of pro-social practices.

The first paper contributes to two different streams of literature. First, it enhances the literature on CSR by taking a new theoretical perspective that provides a novel understanding of the interplay between economic and non-economic explanations of pro-social behaviour. Moreover, by conceptualizing pro-social behaviour as a form of social practice, the Bourdieusian perspective shifts attention to the aspect of individuals' ability to reflect on their pro-social behaviour and broadens the scope of research to include examining CSR on multiple levels of analysis. Second, it contributes to the studies propagating the application of practice-theoretical lenses to studying organizations (e.g. Whittington, 2003) by showing how the practice-theoretical lens of Bourdieu can be extended to the academic literature on CSR, which creates new possibilities for collaborating across different research streams.

The second study, a conceptual work co-authored with David Seidl, is published in the Journal of Applied Behavioural Science. In this study, we examine the adoption of academic knowledge in the field of strategy-as-practice research. Strategy-as-practice is concerned with the daily activities of strategy practitioners and the way these relate to strategic outcomes (Johnson, Melin, & Whittington, 2003). Strategy-as-practice scholars claim that the examination of practitioners' daily activities and what people "really do in strategy" has the potential for considerable practical value. Despite this claim, the conditions and possibilities of strategy-as-practice research for generating knowledge that will be adopted are not examined.

Based on Bourdieu's theory, we argue that the irrelevance of academic strategy knowledge cannot be resolved by focusing on the activities of strategy practitioners. In addition to focusing on strategy practitioners' activities, strategy scholars need to take into account their "scholastic view", i.e., researchers' detached view of the object of research. If strategy-as-practice scholars do not take their scholastic view into account, they generate knowledge that is neither practically relevant nor rigorous. We argue that only by deploying a particular kind of reflexivity, which Bourdieu (2003) referred to as "participant objectivation", are researchers able to produce rigorous research that is also practically relevant to management practitioners. Thus, from a Bourdieusian perspective, practical relevance can only be achieved through a particular form of rigor.

The second study contributes to two sets of literatures: first, it contributes to the strategy-as-practice literature by suggesting participant objectivation as a reflective tool for researchers to generate more rigorous scientific results as well as to offer practically relevant knowledge.

Second, our study contributes to the literature on the practical relevance of management practice by introducing a Bourdieusian approach on relevance, which shows that, in contrast to previous literature (Kieser & Leiner, 2009; Rasche & Behnam, 2009; Seidl, 2007), practical relevance can be achieved through (a particular form of) rigor.

In the third study, an empirical work that will be submitted to the Journal of Management Studies, I examine under which conditions management practitioners consider academic management knowledge as practically relevant. Although the literature on practical relevance acknowledges the constitutive role of the adopting system to achieve practical relevance by discussing the forms of relevance that management research can provide (Pelz, 1978; Nicolai & Seidl, 2010), the adoption and adaptation of academic knowledge (Rasche & Behnam, 2009; Seidl, 2007; Nicolai & Dautwitz, 2010), and the role of the ambiguity of academic knowledge in increasing practical relevance (Astley & Zammuto, 1992; Benders & Bijsterfeld, 2000), it disregards the particular ways in which management practitioners perceive academic management knowledge as relevant. This perceived gap is particularly striking because these studies stress that the particular ways in which research output affects management practice is ultimately determined by practice itself (Kieser, Nicolai, & Seidl, 2015).

To examine the conditions under which management practitioners consider academic knowledge as relevant, the third study draws on practitioners' accounts of the relevance of academic concepts based on data from fifty-three semi-structured interviews. Applying a qualitative method to examine management practitioners' individual interpretations and perceptions (Patton, 2005a; Maitlis, 2005b), a theoretical model of practitioners' relevance construction is developed, which shows that practitioners construct academic knowledge as relevant if practitioners match academic knowledge against their contextual problems and previous knowledge, if academic knowledge extends their knowledge by new instruments, constructs and scientific framing and if they consider academic knowledge as valuable for their organizational contexts and professional practices.

This study contributes to the literature on practical relevance in two main ways: first, in contrast to the commonly held assumption that the ambiguity of academic knowledge increases the likelihood that practitioners consider academic knowledge as relevant (Astley, W. Graham & Zammuto, 1992; Benders & van Veen, 2001; Rasche & Behnam, 2009), this study shows that there are two sides to ambiguity; on the one hand, the ambiguity of academic

knowledge increases the likelihood of being considered as relevant by facilitating the compatibility to a range of contexts and practices. On the other hand, ambiguous academic knowledge decreases the likelihood of being considered as relevant if it provides multiple meaningful courses of action, which overwhelm management practitioners with choosing the course of action that is most meaningful to them. Second, the study contributes to the literature on practical relevance by offering an understanding of the conditions under which management practitioners consider academic knowledge as relevant before they apply this knowledge to their organizational contexts. As practitioners consider academic knowledge as relevant if it is compatible to their contexts and knowledge, practitioners' relevance construction tends to reproduce existing organizational structures in which practitioners' contextual problems and needs might be embedded. In this sense, practitioners' matching of academic knowledge against their existing organizational contexts might lead to reproducing these structures regardless of whether these structures are beneficial or obstructive to the functioning of the organization.

1.5 Contributions

Acknowledging the situatedness of social practices and knowledge, this thesis illuminates three specific areas related to how practices and knowledge are adopted: (1) the influence of the relation between social contexts on adoption, (2) the mechanisms of adoption within organizational contexts and, (3) the role of actors in the adoption of knowledge and practices.

First, this dissertation contributes to the understanding of the ways in which the relation between management science and management practice, conceptualized as different organizational fields characterized by different social structures (Bourdieu, 1990; Splitter & Seidl, forthcoming), affects the adoption of academic management knowledge. In particular, the second paper focuses on the relation between management research and practice from the perspective of management scholars, whereas the third paper focuses on this relation from the perspective of management practitioners. The second paper reveals that although management scholars and managers are both practitioners (Jarzabkowski et al., 2010; Scherer, 1998), they face different structural possibilities and constraints. Because of this difference, management scholars generate knowledge that will not be adopted by management practice. However, scholars can generate knowledge that will be adopted if they apply a particular kind of reflexivity. Although one could state that the relation between management research and

practice is particular in the sense that management science generates knowledge about practice for practice, this phenomenon could also be observed if, for example, an R&D department generated knowledge for other units of an organization. In this sense, the second study reveals the importance of reflexivity in adopting management knowledge generated in other fields.

In turn, the third study contributes to understanding the ways in which the relation between management science and management practice affects the adoption of academic management knowledge by focusing on the managers' perspective. Referring to the situatedness of academic management knowledge, this study shows that management research cannot determine whether practitioners consider academic knowledge as worth adopting to their organizational contexts. Instead, practitioners actively construct the value of adopting academic management knowledge in light of their particular contexts and knowledge. In addition, it is shown that management research generates ambiguous academic knowledge, which facilitates management practitioners' consideration to adopt academic management knowledge, while simultaneously preventing practitioners from considering adopting it. As ambiguous knowledge can be observed in various other organizational contexts, such as strategy reports (Denis, Dompierre, Langley, & Rouleau, 2011; Denis, Langley, & Rouleau, 2006), the finding is relevant to other organizational members who make sense of ambiguous knowledge.

Second, this thesis reveals the conditions for adoption within organizational contexts. In particular, the first study shows that the adoption of social practices, like CSR practices, depends on the particular features of the adopting field, such as actors' unconsciously shared evaluations, the individual managers socially shaped dispositions as well as their stock and amount of resources or capital. Because individual organizational members strive for the legitimation of their capital to maintain or enhance their power positions, they might adopt practice because of economic and non-economic reasons. Thereby, the first study accounts for the interplay between economic and non-economic motivations and the adoption of social practices to organizational contexts as well as for the influence of the macro- and micro level on this adoption.

Third, the dissertation addresses the role of actors in adopting knowledge and practices. The role of individual actors is particularly prominent in the third study focusing on the practical concerns of actors and their stock of knowledge in the form of experiences and intuition that

affect whether they consider to adopt academic management knowledge. The first study approaches the role of actors from yet a different angle focusing on the adoption of CSR practices enacted by individual managers. While there are structural constraints on the adoption of practices, this study emphasizes that it is individual managers' dispositions and their amount and stock of capital that drive the adoption of social practices. In turn, the second study focuses on individually deployed social practices in the field of management research and management practice. It shows that scholars instantiate structural conditions of the field of management research, such as their shared interest in the publication of academic journals, by enacting social practices, such as writing, reviewing or generating academic knowledge.

1.6 Future Research

In emphasizing different aspects of the adoption of pro-social practices and academic management knowledge, this dissertation opens up specific avenues for future research. In the following, I will highlight three themes that can advance the understanding of the overarching question of how pro-social practices and academic management knowledge are adopted: (1) the role of material objects in the adoption of practices and academic knowledge, (2) the implications of the unstable situatedness for adoption, (3) the role of pluralistic contexts for the adoption of social practices and academic management knowledge.

First, future research could take a socio-material perspective that investigates the role of material objects in the process of adopting. Generally, a socio-material perspective "makes a distinctive move away from seeing actors and objects as primarily self-contained entities […] to examining how materiality is intrinsic to everyday activities and relations" (Orlikowski & Scott, 2008: 455). Related to the second and third study, the adoption of academic knowledge mostly involves a material object, in which the academic knowledge is displayed. Such objects can be, for example management tools and techniques (Jarzabkowski & Wilson, 2006). Thus, future research may investigate the role of material objects as mediators or boundary objects (Carlile, 2002; Star, 2010) between the social spheres of management research and practice in order to examine the adoption of academic knowledge.

A particular stance on socio-materiality that theorizes the relationship between humans and non-humans is taken by Bruno Latour (Latour, 1986). His theoretical apparatus entails a shift

from ontological separation of actors and objects to ontological equivalence or symmetry, i.e., there are no "independently existing objects with inherent characteristics" (Barad, 2014: 816), Latour instead speaks of a network of "actants", i.e. humans and non-humans. Drawing on Latour's theoretical framework, future work could thus investigate how the adoption process (or, in a Latourian terms, the translation from actor to actor) takes place if management practitioners and materialized academic knowledge are not analytically differentiated.

Second, another area for future research could investigate the implications of the unstable situatedness of knowledge and practice for their adoption. As situatedness can be conceived as a "dynamic process that unfolds over time" (Van de Ven, Andrew H, 1992: 215), knowledge and practices are not situated in one way but are exposed to a situating process. Relating to the second and third study, this suggests that academic knowledge could be adopted in different ways depending on the momentary situatedness of the adopting context. By acknowledging the changing situatedness that organizational members face (Kaplan & Orlikowski, 2013), future research could investigate how the adoption of academic knowledge is affected by the constantly changing situatedness of the adopting context. Relating particularly to the second study, future work could examine the preconditions for adopting academic knowledge to changing contexts.

A third area that could be explored further is the role of pluralistic contexts for the adoption of practices and knowledge. Relating to the first study, the situatedness within a single social context becomes somewhat problematic in the era of globalization and with the prevalence of multinational corporations operating in pluralistic contexts (Scherer, Palazzo, & Seidl, 2013). Thus, future research could explore the implications of the "co-existence" of pluralistic contexts or hybrid contexts (Powell, 1987; Denis, Langley, Rouleau, 2007) on the adoption of practices. Relating to the second and third paper, future research could investigate how the pluralistic situatedness of organizational actors influences the adoption of academic knowledge. In particular, it could be explored how the difference between multiple organizational settings could be reflexively integrated in the production of academic knowledge in order to be adopted by management practice and the conditions under which individual actors consider adopting academic knowledge when they face multiple, or even contradictory, organizational contexts to which academic management knowledge will be adopted.

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2 Why do corporate actors engage in pro-social behaviour? A Bourdieusian perspective on corporate social responsibility

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Abstract[7]

Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social practice, this paper develops a novel approach to the study of corporate social responsibility (CSR). According to this approach, pro-social activities are conceptualized as social practices that individual managers employ in their efforts to attain social power. Whether such practices are enacted or not depends on (1) the particular features of the social field, (2) the individual managers' socially shaped dispositions and (3) their stock of different forms of capital. By combining these theoretical concepts, the Bourdieusian approach we develop highlights the interplay between the economic and non-economic motivations that underlie CSR, acknowledging influences both on the micro- and the macro-level, as well as deterministic and voluntaristic aspects of human behaviour.

Keywords

Corporate social responsibility, pro-social behaviour, Bourdieu, power, instrumental approach, political approach, practice theory, Bourdieusian approach to CSR, pro-social activity as practice, interplay between economic and non-economic motives, Bourdieu and CSR

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2.1 Introduction

Over the last two decades the corporate world has witnessed a dramatic rise in the concern for corporate social responsibility (CSR) (Carroll, 2008; Vogel, 2005). Corporations engage increasingly in pro-social behaviour, such as supporting healthcare systems, fighting corruption, and eliminating child labour. In the academic literature, the pro-social behaviour of corporations is well documented and examined from a range of different theoretical perspectives (Crane et al., 2008). While this has led to a host of insights into different aspects of CSR, the diverse motivations behind pro-social activities are still not fully understood. Most theoretical approaches to CSR focus *either* on the economic motivations *or* on the non-economic motivations behind CSR – the *economic approach* (McWilliams and Siegel, 2001) and the *political approach* (Scherer and Palazzo, 2011) are prominent examples of each category. As a consequence, very little is known about the interplay between the economic and non-economic motivations that underlie CSR. Of the two approaches that do address different types of motivation simultaneously, i.e. the *managerial utility approach* (Hemingway and Maclagan, 2004) and *institutional theory* (Campbell, 2007), neither examines specifically or sufficiently the interplay between economic and non-economic motivations.

Against this background, the aim of this paper is to develop an approach to CSR that allows researchers to explore how the different types of motivation for pro-social behaviour interact and develop over time. For this purpose we will draw on the practice theory of Pierre Bourdieu. As we will show, his idea that human activities are influenced by the interplay of economic, social, cultural and symbolic elements is especially suited to studying the diverse motivations behind CSR activities. From this perspective, we will conceptualize CSR activities as social practices that are employed by individual managers in their efforts to attain social power. Whether such practices are enacted or not depends on (1) the features of the particular social field (2) the individual managers' socially shaped dispositions and (3) their stock of and quest for (economic, social, cultural and symbolic) capital. By combining these theoretical concepts, our Bourdieusian approach brings to the fore the mechanisms through which the economic and non-economic motivations behind CSR interrelate and develop over time; moreover, it takes into account various influences on both the micro- and the macro-level, as well as deterministic and voluntaristic aspects of human behaviour. This lends our approach the potential to open up a host of novel questions for future research on CSR.

This study contributes to two different streams of literature: first, it enhances the literature on CSR by adding a new theoretical perspective that makes it possible to address important aspects of the CSR phenomenon that other theoretical approaches have not been able to capture. Although the world view that our perspective provides is inevitably partial, we believe that it has the potential to offer decisive insights into motivations behind CSR avtivities. Second, it contributes to the burgeoning number of studies that propagate the application of a practice lens to understanding and studying organizations (Whittington et al., 2006; Whittington, 2003) by showing how this can be extended to the field of CSR – which may create new opportunities for collaboration across different areas of research.

The remainder of this article is structured into four sections. We will begin by reviewing the existing theoretical approaches to CSR and pointing out their assumptions and limitations. Against this background, we will go on to explain how Bourdieu's practice theory can be applied to the study of CSR; for this purpose we will draw particularly on Bourdieu's concepts of *capital*, *habitus*, the *social field* including the field-specific *illusio*. Following that, we will discuss the explanatory power of the Bourdieusian approach in the context of existing approaches to CSR and outline the areas in which our approach can be further developed. We will conclude with a short summary of our argument.

2.2 Review of the prevalent approaches to CSR

A wide variety of definitions of the term CSR can be found in the existing literature. For example, McWilliams and Siegel (2001: 117) describe CSR as 'actions that appear to further some social good, beyond the interests of the firm and that which is required by law', while others emphasize altruistic or 'other-regarding' motivations as key to understanding the concept of social responsibility (Roberts, 2003). For the purposes of this paper we define CSR broadly as the actions of corporate actors that address social and ethical values beyond legal requirements. This definition abstracts from the specific motivations of corporate actors and focuses on the outcomes of their actions. For instance, when corporate actors provide funding to a theatre, their action is a token of CSR, independently of whether they had strategic motives for doing so or felt morally obliged to favour the social good. Here, we refer to the activities that individuals carry out in order to materialize such endeavours as 'pro-social behaviour'. Thus, pro-social behaviour includes, for example, volunteering, philanthropic engagements and releasing budgets that fund 'green' manufacturing.

A review of the CSR literature reveals a host of different theoretical approaches (for an overview see Table 1). Arguably most research in the field of CSR takes an instrumental view of this concept (Lockett et al., 2006; Windsor, 2006). That is, any expenditure that results from pursuing a socially beneficial goal is conceptualized not as a sacrifice of profit but as a corporate investment that helps maximize (future) corporate cash flows. One perspective that propagates such a view is the *economic approach*, according to which pro-social behaviour is a tool for optimizing corporate profit (e.g., McWilliams and Siegel, 2001; Husted and De Jesus Salazar, 2006). This approach presupposes that managers analyse CSR activities without any 'pre-conceived ideas or normative commitments [because] only by correctly analysing supply and demand conditions can managers hope to make CSR decisions that are strategically or economically sound' (Orlitzky et al., 2011: 10). Accordingly, changes in corporate activities that indicate a more pro-social orientation are explained as results of changes in the economic conditions under which corporations operate in their markets, rather than changes in the attitudes of individual managers towards ethically desired goals.

Table 1: Prevalent Theoretical Approaches on CSR

	Economic Approach	*Instrumental Stakeholder Theory*	*Ressource-Based View / Porter's Model of Competitive Advantage*	*Political Approach*	*Normative Stakeholder Theory*	*Integrative Social Contract Theory*	*Managerial Utility Approach*	*Institutionalist Approach*
Indicative publications	Husted/De Jesus Salazar 2006; McWilliams/Siegel 2001	Freeman 1984; Jones 1995	Hart 1995; Porter/Kramer 2002	Bottomley 2007; Scherer/Palazzo 2007	Donaldson/Preston 1995; Freeman/Philips 2003	Donaldson/Dunfee 1994, 1999	Graafland et al. 2007; Hemingway/Maclagan, 2004	Campbell 2007; Marquis et al. 2007
Level of analysis	Individuals or organizations	Individuals or organizations	Organizations	Organizations in society	Individuals or organizations	Individuals	Individuals	Organizations in their institutional context
Logic of action	Voluntaristic	Voluntaristic	Voluntaristic	Voluntaristic	Voluntaristic	Voluntaristic	Deterministic	Deterministic
Reason for engaging in CSR	Enhancement/ maintenance of the firm's long-term economic value [economic calculus dominant]	Enhancement/ maintenance of the firm's long-term economic value [economic calculus dominant]	Enhancement/ maintenance of the firm's long-term economic value [economic calculus dominant]	Moral duty [economic calculus domestified]	Moral duty [economic calculus domestified]	Moral duty [economic calculus domestified]	Managers' preferences [economic calculus contingent]	Legitimacy and survival of the corporation [economic calculus contingent]
Basic message	Managers engage in CSR activities to the extent that the incurred costs are outweighed by additional revenues	Prudent managers should care about CSR as this improves relations with stakeholders	Corporations should engage in CSR as this is an important source of competitive advantage	Corporations should engage in political processes to fill the regulatory vacuum in contemporary societies	Ethical managers should care about CSR as stakeholders' interests are of intrinsic value	Contracts should reflect hypernorms and voluntary consent	Pro-social behaviour is driven by managers' pro-social preferences	Corporations engage in CSR activities in order to preserve their legitimacy in the face of institutional pressures
Limitations	Does not consider non-economic motives for engaging in CSR	Does not consider non-economic motives for engaging in CSR	Does not consider non-economic motives for engaging in CSR	Does not explain why some corporations accept moral duty and others do not	Does not explain why some corporations accept moral duty and others do not	Does not explain why some corporations accept moral duty and others do not	Does not address the interplay between economic and non-economic motivations and the respective changes over time	Does not address the interplay between economic and non-economic motivations and the respective differences between actors in the same field

A second approach, which is related to this economic perspective, is based on *instrumental stakeholder theory*. According to this approach corporations are expected to satisfy their stakeholders' demands, however, taking stakeholder interests into account is seen as rooted in firm performance (Freeman, 1984; Jones, 1995; Pajunen, 2006). Indeed, stakeholder theory defines and identifies stakeholders according to their relevance to economic success. Because stakeholders are considered to provide important resources, satisfying their needs becomes a precondition for achieving sustainable business success (Hill and Jones, 1992). Consequently, corporations are expected to satisfy the needs of those groups of stakeholders that may have a significant influence on the ability of corporations to survive and make profit. Conversely, without an economic incentive, corporations are expected not to respond to stakeholder demands (Berman et al., 1999). The same logic applies to approaches that are based on *Porter's model of competitive advantage* or on the *resource-based view of the firm*. The former argues that pro-social behaviour serves both business *and* society (Porter and Kramer, 2006). This model assumes that there is no trade-off between profits and social goals, such as 'philanthropic investments'; consequently, the antagonism between profit and ethics can be resolved (Porter and Kramer, 2002). Even governmental regulation is said to enhance the competitiveness of corporations, as regulations may trigger innovations (Porter and van der Linde, 1995). Similarly, the resource-based view argues that pro-social behaviour can contribute to the development of rare, valuable and non-substitutable resources that provide the basis for competitive advantage. In his natural-resource-based view of the firm, Hart (1995) suggests, for example, that companies have to follow three interconnected strategies (pollution prevention, product stewardship, and sustainable development) to sustain a competitive advantage.

All of the above perspectives conceptualize CSR activities as a means of sustaining or furthering economic wealth. Many empirical studies support such an instrumental view by showing that pro-social behaviour may favour business prospects in many respects (e.g., Borck and Coglianese, 2009; Stites and Michael, 2011). However, the idea of the 'virtuous circle' (Porter and Kramer, 2002) through which economic profit and the social good reinforce each other does not grasp the whole story. For instance, Margolis and Walsh's meta-analysis (2003) has undermined belief in the empirical validity of the positive relationship between social responsibility and economic profit. Thus, explaining pro-social activities as a form of enlightened value maximization seems to be too simple. In the existing literature there are many examples of companies that have engaged in pro-social activities in the absence of any economic incentive (Matten and Crane, 2005); these empirical examples

demonstrate the limitations of approaches that assume profit maximization as the sole explanation for corporate actions.

There are, however, other theoretical approaches to CSR, which transcend purely economic explanations of corporate activities and do not assume that all pro-social behaviour necessarily benefits the corporation itself. One prominent example is the *political approach* to CSR, which emphasizes the political role of corporations because of their power to influence social life inside and outside the firm (Davis, 1976). This approach goes beyond the instrumental view of corporations in that it puts forward 'a new understanding of global politics where […] corporations […] play an active role in the democratic regulation and control of market transactions' (Scherer and Palazzo, 2011: 3; see also Bottomley, 2007; Deetz, 1991). In that view, corporations are not only economic but also political actors that have the duty to engage in political processes in order to fill the regulatory vacuum in contemporary societies (Scherer and Palazzo, 2007). This political role broadens the scope of corporate activity significantly, as corporations are not expected simply to serve markets but also to fulfil political functions, which may include supporting healthcare systems, fighting corruption, providing education or preserving peace (Logsdon and Wood, 2002). To cope with such tasks, corporations have to restrain the economic calculus and install a mode of governance that is in line with democratic principles (Gilbert et al., 2011; Steinmann and Scherer, 1998).

Another approach that transcends purely economic explanations is *normative stakeholder theory*, which claims that the purpose of business is value creation for various stakeholders and that each stakeholder group merits consideration for its own sake (Freeman et al., 2004; Bowie, 2012; Donaldson and Preston, 1995). Managers should not try to satisfy the interests of stakeholder groups in expectation of profitability in the long term, but because it is their fiduciary duty to do so. This duty becomes most obvious in moral and economic trade-offs, where satisfying one group of stakeholders comes at the price of dissatisfying another stakeholder group. In order to give greater guidance in such situations, scholars have combined stakeholder theory with various ethical approaches such as those developed by Rawls (Phillips, 1997), deontologists (Bowie, 1999), critical theorists (Reed, 2002), and libertarian scholars (Freeman and Philips, 2002).

The *integrative social contract theory* (ISCT) follows a similar line of argument. This approach focuses on two kinds of contracts that managers have to adhere to in order to fulfil their moral responsibilities: macro- and micro-social contracts (Donaldson and Dunfee, 1999).

The former is a hypothetical contract among economic agents that defines the normative ground rules for creating the latter. Whereas the macro-social contract demands the informed consent of the contracting parties, the micro-social contract reflects the social and cultural embedding of the contracting parties in local communities. However, Donaldson and Dunfee assume that the informed consent that the macro-social contract stipulates is not a satisfactory restriction on corporate contracting in real life, as it virtually allows companies to draft a contract any way they please. To address that shortcoming, they introduce the notion of 'hypernorms', which reflect the convergence of 'religious, political, and philosophical thought' (Donaldson and Dunfee, 2000: 441). The purpose of hypernorms is to impose additional restrictions on the activities of managers, who ought to 'respect the dignity of each human person' even if this implies economic loss (Donaldson and Dunfee, 1994: 267).

Clearly, all three perspectives – the ISCT, normative stakeholder theory and the political approach – have the potential to give guidance on moral issues in the business world. Indeed, there are many firms that use 'social criteria as a basis for actions that are right, good, and just for society' and engage in pro-social behaviour 'for the singular goal of helping others' (Sánchez, 2000: 364). However, as these three theories are primarily normative they do not explain *why* some corporate actors accept their moral duty by engaging in pro-social activities while others do not. While they argue for the primacy of non-economic motives over economic ones, they do not explore under which conditions the behaviour of corporate actors is prompted by the former rather than the latter.

The *managerial utility approach* appears more successful in explaining why managers behave in a pro-social manner. This approach rests on the basic insight that their personal values affect not only the way in which managers perceive and interpret the world but also the choices they make. Consequently, it conceptualizes pro-social behaviour as a manifestation of managerial preferences (Hemingway and Maclagan, 2004; Swanson, 2008). Starting from the assumption that these preferences are not entirely determined by organizational structures and available resources, it posits that managers use their discretion to express their personal values in their decisions (Wood, 1991). Several empirical studies support this view. For example, Agle, Mitchell and Sonnenfeld (1999) found a significant relationship between the values of CEOs and corporate social performance, while Graafland et al. (2007) compiled evidence that the religious beliefs of corporate leaders are reflected in corporate business conduct. Overall, the managerial utility approach explains quite persuasively differences in the degree to which managers engage in pro-social activities on the basis of differences in their preferences.

Nevertheless, although this approach allows addressing both economic and non-economic motivations in relation to CSR, it does not explore how they interact and develop over time, which limits its ability to explain changes in pro-social behaviour.

In contrast to the micro-level focus of the managerial utility approach, the *institutional approach* concentrates on the macro-level, which includes the market, local communities and state regulation (e.g., Campbell, 2007; Marquis et al., 2007). From that perspective, the various forms of pro-social behaviour are explained through the embeddedness of organizations in different formal and informal institutions, such as laws and religious norms respectively (Brammer et al., 2012): in order to preserve their legitimacy and ensure their survival, organizations conform to institutionalized expectations of pro-social behaviour. While corporations that operate in the same institutional field are considered to be subject to the same institutional pressures and to adopt the same pro-social practices, pro-social behaviour is expected to vary across institutional fields (Doh and Guay, 2006; Kang and Moon, 2012).

The institutional approach clearly highlights the importance of the institutional environment in explaining pro-social behaviour. It thus addresses both economic and non-economic motives by relating them to CSR expectations within institutional contexts such as economic and legal systems or geographical regions. However, like the managerial utility approach, the institutional approach does not address the interplay between economic and non-economic motivations in the context of CSR. In addition, it is not able to explain differences in pro-social behaviour between organizations in the *same* institutional field, i.e. organizations confronted with the same institutional pressures.

As this overview has shown, the existing literature comprises a wide range of different theoretical approaches that can be used to explore the phenomenon of CSR. While each of these has helped to shed light on various important aspects of pro-social behaviour, they all have their limitations when it comes to explaining different categories of motivations that lead to such behaviour. Most commonly, they either overemphasize one category but disregard others, or they fail to explore the interplay between different categories. Against this background we will now introduce the central building blocks of the Bourdieusian approach we have developed in order to address this gap in understanding CSR activities.

2.3 A Bourdieusian perspective on pro-social practices

Bourdieu puts social practices, i.e., socially shaped activities performed by individual actors, at the centre of his analysis (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990). Actors, such as members of an organization, enact many different kinds of practices, including pro-social practices such as giving donations, attending courses on green technologies or organizing charity dinners. These practices are enacted in various social arenas – which Bourdieu termed 'social fields' – where people compete for different kinds of economic, social, cultural and symbolic assets that he referred to as 'capital'. According to Bourdieu (1986), an individual's motive for enacting any particular practice is the chance to increase his or her capital and thus attain power. According to this rationale, actors are expected to employ pro-social practices whenever they assume that this will increase their capital and thus improve their relative power position in the social field. This, however, does not mean that actors employ pro-social practices strategically. On the contrary, such practices are more likely to be enacted without conscious reflection. In this sense, pro-social practices follow a 'practical' – not a rational – logic. In the following we will introduce a Bourdieusian perspective on CSR by elaborating on his concepts of *capital*, *habitus* and *field* including the field specific *illusio*.

2.3.1 Pro-social practices as a means of transforming individual capital

According to Bourdieu (1977, 1990, 2005) all practices are directed towards the acquisition and transformation of an individual's (monetary or non-monetary) *capital*. By enacting practices, actors invest the capital they have acquired through former practices, in order to acquire more of the same capital or to transform it into other types of capital.

Bourdieu (1986) distinguishes between three general forms of capital: *economic capital* refers to monetary income as well as other financial resources and assets. Actors such as shareholders possess economic capital in the form of shares in the firm, whereas in the case of managers or employees capital takes the form of budget control and wages. *Cultural capital* exists in two different forms: *incorporated* cultural capital, which consists in experiences and habits acquired during the socialization process and manifested in an actor's knowledge, and *institutionalized* cultural capital, which consists in formal educational qualifications. Institutionalized cultural capital in the form of a job title, such as 'CEO' or 'chairman', can be conferred. What is conferrable here is the title itself – the institutionalized cultural capital – and not what constitutes the precondition for the specific appropriation, i.e., the possession of

the means of 'being CEO' or practicing it as this entails the incorporated cultural capital. *Social capital* is the sum of resources that can be mobilized through membership in or access to important networks. Of particular importance here are 'strong ties' to other individuals, which promote trust and reciprocity and facilitate the transfer of private information and critical resources (Gulati et al., 2002). In the context of organizations, the social capital of different actors may thus differ in regard to the strength and reach of their ties to other actors within and outside their organization.

Like all other practices, pro-social practices have to be understood as attempts to acquire or transform capital. For example, the description by Jennings (2006) of how Dennis Koslowski as CEO of Tyco, a global leader in fire safety and security solutions, sponsored a travelling museum show can be interpreted as an account of the transformation of Koslowski's economic capital (i.e., the budget of 4.5 million dollars at his disposal) into social and cultural capital: through this sponsorship he probably developed relationships with impresarios and directors of theatres (social capital) and additionally gained specific knowledge on e.g. funding theatres and the arts in general (cultural capital). In this and similar examples, pro-social practices can be understood as attempts to transform an individual actor's economic capital into other forms of capital. From this perspective, pro-social behaviour can be understood not as a sacrifice of economic capital for the social good, but as a *transformation* of the amount and structure of an individual actor's capital into other forms of capital. Thus, the voluntary sponsorship of museum shows in particular, and engaging in pro-social behaviour in general, can be regarded as an 'anti-economic economy' (Bourdieu, 1993: 54): economic resources are transformed into other forms of capital, which in turn can be invested so that other practices can be enacted.

Bourdieu argued that, in order to appreciate fully how capital functions and how it is converted from one type to another, it is necessary to take into account an important characteristic of all types of capital, namely, that they are based on mutual cognition and recognition among actors (Bourdieu, 1980, 1986, 1996). This is what lends capital a symbolic character and function. Symbolic capital cannot be regarded as another form of capital; economic, cultural and social capital are transformed into symbolic capital if they are accorded positive recognition, esteem or honour by other actors. Thus, in order to understand why an organizational member engages in pro-social practices it is vital to take into account the symbolic functioning or transformation of that individual's capital.

To elucidate symbolic transformations two points have to be highlighted. The first point is that individuals might enact practices that function as 'representatives' of other practices. Thus, we have to distinguish the practice of publicly documenting (that is, the representation of) pro-social practices from the pro-social practices themselves. For example, actors might describe on their corporate websites and in their reports how they apply pro-social practices. While people often assume a direct relation between the practice of description and that of application, this might not be the case. One potential problem with representations is that actors may anticipate the perceptions and evaluations of others and, as a result, mask the real motivation for engaging in pro-social behaviour. To return to the example we used above, managers at Tyco might have engaged in pro-social activities such as sponsoring museum shows in order to increase Tyco's brand reputation. However, as other actors such as consumers and members of NGOs might evaluate this as 'narcissistic' investment (Roberts, 2001) and, consequently, deny its symbolic recognition, the PR managers of Tyco might choose not to communicate the economic motivation that underlies the act of sponsoring. Instead they might present this investment as Tyco's authentic attempt of promoting the social good. In this way, representational practices may mask the real motivations of actors to engage in pro-social behaviour. Thus, reports may function as 'self-presentational devices' that are 'self-laudatory', rather than as accurate accounts of pro-social activities (Hooghiemstra, 2000).

The second point is that representational practices might function as a kind of 'simulacra' (Deleuze and Krauss, 1983). Whereas in the case we have just described individuals enact certain practices but mask the underlying motivation, simulacra represent practices that do not exist. In that sense they are not representations of real practices but of illusions. That is, managers report that they enact their moral duties with regard to the social good, but do not enact the respective practices: their reports function as simulacra that aim to deceive other actors. Roberts (2003: 250) described such behaviour as a 'sort of prosthesis, readily attached to the corporate body, that repairs its appearance but in no way changes its actual conduct'. Others have described such practices as 'green-washing' or 'blue-washing' – i.e. painting over a corporation's image with the veneer of environmental or social responsibility respectively (Laufer, 2003). The reason behind such practices is, again, the effort of individuals to acquire and transform capital. As long as the deceived actors perceive simulacra as representations of real practices, simulacra are transformed into symbolic capital that ultimately enhances the capital that fraudsters possess.

2.3.2 Habitus as producer of pro-social practices

According to Bourdieu (1977), the engagement of actors in pro-social practices depends not only on the possibility and legitimacy of transforming capital but also on the individual actors' disposition, their so-called *habitus*. The concept of habitus emphasizes that practices are engendered and regulated by incorporated, generalized, transposable perceptions and ways of thinking, rather than just by cultural roles, by norms or by conscious intentions, meanings or calculations (Swartz, 2002). Habitus provides actors with a kind of generative grammar, i.e. with cognitive frames and preferences that direct their actions (Golsorkhi et al., 2009). Bourdieu defines habitus as 'systems of durable, transposable dispositions' (1977: 72), which actors have acquired during the process of their personal socialization. Thus, the members of an organization are more likely to behave pro-socially if they have acquired the corresponding disposition through past practices. For example, the manner in which pro-social behaviour is taught – if at all – at universities, influences an individual's future practices via the dispositions of which that individual's habitus consists. For example, in their meta-analysis of more than fifty studies, Schaeffli, Rest and Thoma (1985) found that moral reasoning increased through moral education, particularly in the case of participants in their twenties and thirties. Given that most students are in this age group, Trevino and Nelson (2010: 15-17) concluded that courses in business ethics clearly have the ability to change an actor's disposition towards pro-social behaviour.

Since dispositions are tied to individuals, whether organizations engage in CSR or not depends on their individual members. In the light of this, it is not surprising to observe that areas of corporate funding often shift when the organizational members change (Roschwalb, 1990). When members of the organization employ pro-social practices, this reflects their unique dispositions. Thus, these members' dispositions – their cognitive frames and preferences – are key to understanding whether and in which manner they engage in pro-social practices. In this vein, the preferences of managers are 'significantly associated with the direction of foundation charitable activities for certain causes' (Werbel and Carter, 2002: 56).

Another aspect of Bourdieu's concept of habitus is that action tends to be less consciously reflective than commonly assumed. Bourdieu writes that 'agents never know completely what they are doing' (1990: 69) because their practices are largely reflective of their habitus. Consequently, pro-social practices largely occur tacitly. That does not mean, however, that engaging in pro-social practices is never the result of strategic conduct; of course it is possible

that, for example, certain members of an organization may consciously fund museum shows to achieve some instrumental end. However, as Bourdieu argues, most of the time actors are not aware of how their practices are driven by dispositions that have been 'formed through past experience' (Dewey, 1988: 33). In this sense, pro-social practices do not follow a rational but a 'practical' logic as actors do not 'generally adopt the theoretical attitude of seeing action as a choice among all other possibilities; they usually see one or a few possibilities' (Calhoun, 1999: 145). Pro-social practices are thus immanent in a certain habitus and reveal themselves as a process of everyday practical coping. Practical coping occurs in the broader context in which the members of an organization enact their practices (Chia and Holt, 2006; Garsten and Hasselström, 2003). Bourdieu refers to this broader context as the 'social field', which we will introduce in the next section.

2.3.3 Pro-social practices as a struggle for power in organizational fields

Whether individuals engage or not in pro-social practices depends not only on their habitus and the composition of their capital but also on the specific structures of the 'field', that is, the social contexts in which they are embedded. In other words, the conditions that must be fulfilled for a pro-social practice to be enacted 'cannot be understood without addressing the context [i.e. the social field] within which it takes place' (Dillard and Yuthas, 2002: 52). For Bourdieu (1996, 2005), the social field is constituted by the network of relations among different actors. More precisely, he relates the concept of social fields to the concepts of capital and habitus to show that social fields are structures of power relations among actors and that social action has a perpetuating or transforming effect on these relations. In other words, social fields are political arenas (Brint and Karabel, 1991). Because capital is not equally distributed, actors in social fields continuously strive to acquire (different forms of) capital, as bearers of different amounts and combinations of capital, some of which yield greater advantages within that particular field than others. Accordingly, it is possible to distinguish between *dominating* and *dominated positions*, depending on the amount and composition of capital. The overall pattern of dominant and dominated positions constitutes (the objective structure of) the social field (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990, 2005).

In our context, the relevant social field is the organizational field, which reflects the current power relations among different actors in and around the focal organization. The organizational field does not include only the actors of the focal organization – even though this part is especially relevant to explaining the practices of these particular actors – but all

actors that play a role in a given activity, as power relations usually extend the organization's boundary (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991). Thus, the organizational field may include some of the managers of other corporations, suppliers, customers, journalists, investors and members of governmental and non-governmental organizations.

As the members of an organization continuously strive to acquire capital through their practices, the positions of all actors in the organizational field, and consequently its structure, are not stable. Thus, the structure of the organizational field is constituted by the actual power relations among actors, which are characterized by an ongoing power struggle for attaining a dominant position in the field. This implies that, within the organizational field, positions are negotiated, and also created, through the pro-social manoeuvrings of employees, investors, members of NGOs and so on. The aim of these manoeuvrings – or practices – is to transform capital in a way that will increase an actor's power in the organizational field. Capital therefore plays a key role – as a weapon, constraint or stake – in determining the development and range of possible actions available to agents (Malsch et al., 2011). The acquisition of capital underlies all social actions as the different forms of capital can be employed as weapons to defend an actor's position and as stakes to achieve a better position (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 98).

In this sense, the members of an organization engage in pro-social practices if these can either enhance or stabilize their position. For example, in their case study of massive downsizing at a Swedish company, Bergström and Diedrichs (2011) showed how an actor's position may be enhanced via pro-social practices. Although more than 10,000 people were dismissed, most actors, including the Swedish government, seemed to agree that the company had demonstrated social responsibility in the process of dismissal, as the discharged workers were supported through various voluntary programmes financed by the company. The managers who developed and implemented these voluntary programmes employed their individual capital in order to get promoted to spokespersons for the company's social responsibility and thus enhance their respective field positions.

At the same time however, actors who enact pro-social practices occasionally risk significantly their power position in an organizational field because their investment of capital might fail. In Drumright's documentation (1994) of how an organization changed its policies to move towards greener purchasing, an actor judged the risk she took in fighting for greener buying decisions in the following way:

> It was scary.... What made it scary was the 'what if's'. What if I misjudge the intensity or the longevity of the issue.... I didn't think I could lose my job, but I was concerned I could lose my credibility. Obviously, the downside was when this thing goes to the top; if they say, 'No, we don't agree', it could be damaging to my career. (1994: 5)

Through pro-social practices actors might also be able to stabilize their dominant positions. Top managers, for example, may engage in pro-social practices in order to acquire the symbolic capital that is needed to stabilize their power. Norbert Reithofer, the CEO of BMW, for example, financed the Institute for Advanced Study at the Technical University of Munich and was in turn awarded an honorary doctorate from the same university (TU-Munich, 2010; BMW-Group, 2010). In this case, the CEO's economic capital, in the form of budget control, and his social capital, in the form of his personal relations to other dominant actors at this university, were transformed into an institutionalized form of cultural capital. An honorary doctorate is highly recognized in the organizational field and can thus be seen as a form of symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986) that legitimizes the capital owner's dominant position. Thus, the *willingness* of actors to engage in pro-social practices depends on whether these generate capital that can enhance or stabilize their position, whereas their *ability* to act pro-socially is determined by the capital that they hold or to which they have access (Lawrence, 1999). Symbolic capital – and the means by which it is created – plays a central role in power relations among the relative positions of actors in a field because it provides a basis 'for a non-economic form of domination and hierarchy' (Gaventa, 2003: 6).

In order to explain why particular (pro-social or other) practices are regarded as legitimate or not and how dominant actors might influence this perception, it is necessary to introduce the concept of *illusio* as a particularly important aspect of the social field. In Bourdieu's practice theory, the concept of illusio stands for the field members' unconsciously shared evaluations of the different forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1997). That is, by determining what value the actors within a field attribute to different forms of capital, the illusio shapes the respective power struggles in the field (Bourdieu, 1984, 1988, 1990). At the same time, through their struggles for capital, actors acknowledge and reinforce the importance of specific forms of capital, which in turn reproduces the illusio. The transformation of resources within a particular field is thus related to the actors' assumptions of what is of value in that field (Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011). Hence, illusio can also be described as an ideology that determines how actors in a specific field perceive the legitimacy of particular pro-social practices (Abercrombie and Turner, 1978).

From that perspective, illusio can be said to function 'like the imperial system – a wonderful instrument of ideology, much bigger and more powerful than television or propaganda' (Bourdieu and Eagleton, 1992: 114) or as 'legitimate violence' (Bourdieu, 1993: 73), in the sense that it regulates the relationships between agents in a field in such a way that it favours those who have already the most established positions. For that reason, it serves the interests of the dominant actors, who in the organizational field might be the CEOs and large shareholders of corporations or activists from NGOs, as these have the capacity to determine which composition of capital will be the most influential and dominant in the field. Dominant actors, albeit largely unconsciously, are those who define activities as legitimate and formulate the policies of the organizational field; in other words, they shape the rules according to which the struggle for power is conducted. On the basis of the field's illusio, they can largely control which, if any, pro-social practices are able to produce valuable capital that can enhance the positions of actors in that field. Consequently, in order to enhance their positions according to the field's illusio, dominated actors conform to the pro-social perceptions of dominant actors. In that way, all members of the field unconsciously contribute to the formation and continuation of the ideology and thus limit the possibilities of resistance. Even though some members of the organizational field may privately disagree with the (positive or negative) evaluation of particular pro-social practices, they will nevertheless conform to the field's illusio in their effort to enhance their power in the field. Because the habitus of actors is also shaped by the illusio of a given field, the alignment of habitus with the field's illusio lends actors the practical ability to perceive their position as natural and their practices as the natural way to operate.

A good example of how dominant actors determine the illusio and thus the legitimacy of pro-social practices is the study of PackCo by Baker und Roberts (2011). They describe how the chairman of that company, for various reasons, was keen on engaging in environmental programmes, which he considered exemplary of PackCo's 'noble purpose'. However, when a survey revealed that the employees were not satisfied with the way the company dealt with its social responsibility, top managers did not change their perception of the company's 'noble purpose'. Instead, they reinterpreted the poll's results as a failure on the employees' part to appreciate properly PackCo's social responsibility and tried by various means to 'educate' staff on employee responsibility towards the environment. Baker and Roberts concluded that 'responsibility was in this way turned into an obligation of staff; [the] management's role was only to ensure that staff understood the company's self defined ideals (2011: 13).

2.3.4 Changes in the legitimacy of pro-social behaviour as result of field changes

The legitimacy of pro-social practices within a particular social field might change over time. Illegitimate practices might become legitimate and vice-versa. Zadek (2004), for example, described how Nike's attitude to pro-social practices changed dramatically in the course of a few years. Such changes have to be conceptualized as the result of changes in the illusio of a particular field. According to Bourdieu, we can distinguish two central mechanisms of change. Both of these mechanisms rest on the interplay between habitus and field.

The first mechanism results from changes in the dispositions of the dominant actors. As we have argued before, actors will only engage in pro-social practices if the dominant actors have deemed these practices legitimate i.e., if these practices conform to the field's illusio. Whether or not dominant actors deem such practices legitimate ultimately depends on their individual dispositions, i.e., their habitus. However, the dominant actors' habitus might change (Bourdieu, 1984; Navarro, 2006) and, as a consequence, their evaluation of pro-social behaviour might also change. For instance, to go back to the example of Tyco, the fact that the then CEO Dennis Koslowski became a member of the Whitney Museum's board during his time as a CEO at Tyco may well have shaped his attitude towards certain pro-social practices (Jennings, 2006). Thus, his habitus might have been modified through the acquisition of new dispositions that he gained as a participant in another social field – that of fine arts. As the evaluation of pro-social practices depends on the preferences and interests of the dominant actors, Dennis Koslowski, as dominant actor, was in the position to determine that philanthropy (i.e., giving donations to institutions like theatres, museums, schools and the like) was to be considered a legitimate practice in the organizational field of Tyco. Thus dominant members are able to change the understanding of pro-social behaviour by controlling the illusio of a particular organizational field in that they determine whether particular pro-social practices are deemed productive and legitimate in that field.

The second mechanism of change does not rest on the reproduction of the established power structures, but on revolutionary changes made to the established power structures that are induced by 'newcomers' (Golsorkhi et al., 2009). In other words, the system of authority within a field can change, including the very rules according to which the field operates (Bourdieu, 1984; Madsen, 2004). A change in the power structures typically results from a mismatch between the dominant actors' habitus and the structures that are specific to a given organizational field. As Bourdieu writes, this mismatch

> can be clearly seen in all the situations in which [habitus is] not the product of the conditions of its actualization […]: this is the case […] when old people quixotically cling to dispositions that are out of place and out of time; or when the dispositions of an agent rising, or falling, in the social structure […] are at odds with the position that agent occupies. (Bourdieu, 2005: 214)

Thus, when the habitus of the dominant actors is no longer in line with the field structures, an opportunity is created for other actors to challenge the existing positions of power. For example, when the habitus of a CEO becomes unaligned with the structures of the field, other members of the executive team might gradually edge the CEO out of his or her dominant position. If these executives have been socialized differently – for example as a result of their business education – they might also introduce new views on pro-social behaviour. In other words, because the CEO's habitus no longer matches the new structure of the organizational field, the other executives are able to occupy positions that are no longer accessible to the CEO. When the habitus encounters a social field that is discrepant from the fields in which it originated, it triggers the transformation of the rules that are specific to the new field (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). In the above example, the habitus of the new executives might trigger the re-evaluation of and an increase in the value of pro-social practices within the organizational field. The executives' influence on the field's illusio will also trigger a reassessment of which capital is of value and consequently a change in the power structure of the organizational field. In this sense, new actors who enter an organizational field might reshape that field's struggles and change the current understanding of pro-social behaviour. Through their habitus, the newcomers might endow with legitimacy their own composition of capital within the organizational field; as a result, they may shift the power structure by excluding the existing holders of legitimate capital from key positions. In this case a new structure of domination emerges in that field, with other rules, stakes and forms of capital, as well as a new illusio that will change the beliefs and values of actors in relation to pro-social behaviour.

2.4 Discussion: Comparison and further development of a Bourdieusian approach to CSR

The Bourdieusian approach to CSR developed here provides a new way of exploring why organizational actors engage in pro-social behaviour. In the following we will discuss and compare the merits of this approach with those of existing theoretical perspectives on CSR and outline the areas in which it could be further developed.

2.4.1 Comparison of the Bourdieusian approach to the prevalent approaches to CSR

The Bourdieusian approach developed in this paper can be compared to other approaches in relation to three central aspects (see also Table 1). The first point of comparison concerns the *reason for engaging* in CSR, according to each approach. The Bourdieusian logic of the 'anti-economic economy' has provided important insights into why corporate actors engage in pro-social behaviour. According to Bourdieu, these decisions need not be driven by the economic impact they are expected to have on shareholder value, as instrumental approaches suggest (i.e., the economic approach, instrumental stakeholder theory and the resource-based view or Porter's model of competitive advantage), nor by an 'intrinsic rationale' (Basu and Palazzo, 2008) of managers or corporations that restrains the economic calculus (as suggested by the political approach, normative stakeholder theory, and integrative social contract theory). If managers invest their capital in CSR initiatives – such as participating in the Global Compact, voluntarily disclosing information about supply chains or engaging in political lobbying for mandatory regulations on global standards for social auditing (Zadek, 2004) – according to our Bourdieusian approach this should be interpreted as individual attempts to gain capital that will help these managers to sustain or enhance their position in the respective organizational field.

Although in this respect our Bourdieusian perspective seems to be similar to instrumental perspectives on CSR two differences have to be highlighted: first, our Bourdieusian perspective expands the role of the calculus for maximizing capital, assuming that all organizational practices aim at the transformation and acquisition of different forms of capital, and not just of economic capital. In that sense, it makes no sense to speak of 'costly philanthropy' (Mackey et al., 2007: 818). Second, our Bourdieusian approach clearly extends simple instrumental understandings of the role of capital by highlighting the inextricably social and political nature of the process of capital acquisition and conversion (Everett, 2002), as well as the key role of symbolic mediation in this process. Consequently, our Bourdieusian perspective conceives the value of social and of cultural capital as independent of their economic impact. In that respect, the transformation and acquisition of these forms of capital can be regarded as independent of the possession of economic capital, in the sense that social capital can be transformed into cultural capital (and vice versa) without economic capital being involved in this transformation. Instead, the value of CSR practices and the likelihood that they will be enacted depend ultimately on the interplay between the ideology of a given

field, the preferences of the actors in that field and the actors' capital positions employed. The Bourdieusian perspective developed here allows for a wide range of motivations for engaging in CSR, including authentic concern for the social good (as assumed by normative approaches), as well as instrumental concern for economic profit (as suggested by the various instrumental approaches). Thus, it overcomes the limitations of one-sided treatments of the relationship between profit and pro-social behaviour.

From the Bourdieusian perspective presented in this paper, the value of capital is determined by its symbolic transformation. Consequently, the role of economic capital in explaining pro-social behaviour is not predetermined but contingent on the specific constellation of other factors. In that sense, it has certain similarities to the managerial utility approach and the institutional perspective, both of which assume that the role of economic capital is contingent either on the preference structure of individuals or the institutional structure. The difference from these approaches lies in the way the contingency is conceptualized: the managerial utility approach and the intuitionalist perspective allow for a disregard of the capital maximization calculus depending on the respective institutional structures or individual preferences. By contrast, our Bourdieusian perspective does not allow for the possibility that actors may altogether disregard the calculus of capital maximization as such. Bourdieu assumes that there is always an (implicit) attempt to maximize *some* form of capital so, in that sense, capital maximization is not limited to *economic* capital. Thus, the perspective presented in this paper offers a novel understanding of pro-social behaviour, based on Bourdieu's notion of an 'anti-economic economy', which provides a framework for analysing and explaining systematically the interplay of economic and non-economic motivations in relation to pro-social behaviour.

The second point of comparison concerns the *logic of action*, that is, the extent to which pro-social behaviours are treated as result of a conscious choice between alternative courses of action In the Bourdieusian approach presented here, action is based on a 'practical logic' (Bourdieu, 1990), i.e. actions are conceptualized as typically unreflective selections between alternatives and as part of a form of 'practical coping' (Chia and Holt, 2006). This distinguishes our approach clearly from the prevalent approaches to CSR. More specifically, according to the economic approach, managers act in an economically rational manner; that is, they calculate the outcomes of alternative courses of action and choose voluntarily between these alternatives. The political approach also assumes voluntaristic action but differs in its understanding of rationality, which it defines discursively. In both stakeholder approaches,

managers are assumed to resolve the potential trade-off between stakeholder interests by critically reflecting on the entitlements and potential influences of each group, while the integrative social contract theory posits that managers have the duty to reflect and ultimately change their contracting behaviour. The common point of all these approaches is that they assume that corporate actors can select between different courses of action and that they do so consciously. In other words, they argue that managers are able to decide to engage in pro-social behaviour as a result of critical reflection, without being constrained by 'objective structures' (Bourdieu, 1990) that would determine their perceptions and evaluations.

The managerial utility and the institutionalist approach make the opposite assumption about the logic of action. The latter does not explicitly clarify the extent to which personal values are accessible to critical reflection. However, because it assumes that individual values are determined by cultural and religious settings to which actors are exposed (Hemingway and Maclagan, 2004), one could argue that the managerial utility approach assumes that managers are largely determined in their choice of actions. Finally, the institutionalist approach conceives pro-social actions as the purely reactive responses of corporations to institutional pressures, leaving little room for manoeuvre. From that viewpoint, pro-social practices do not reflect the voluntary actions of managers but are induced by social structures. In relation to CSR, choices are highly institutionalised, and thus 'beyond the discretion of any individual participant or organization' (Meyer and Rowan, 1977: 344).

The Bourdieusian approach provides a different take on the concept of action which combines deterministic and voluntaristic elements. It assumes that the field structures and the habitus define a limited set of alternative courses of actions that the corporate actor can choose from both consciously and unconsciously. Under normal circumstances the selection will be done in the mode of practical coping, i.e. without critical reflection. Yet in cases of a practical breakdown, such as created by a mismatch between habitus and field, actors have the possibility of switching into a mode of conscious reflection. Thus, the Bourdieusian approach goes beyond the one-sided treatments of action in the existing approaches to CSR by allowing for a switching between different levels of consciousness in the enactment of pro-social behaviour. This novel angle allows the Bourdieusian perspective to call the researcher's attention to two important questions that have hardly been addressed in the CSR literature so far: to what extent are pro-social practices consciously enacted and to what degree are actors able to critically reflect on them? These questions are crucial, particularly for normative approaches that emphasize the responsibility of managers concerning wider social issues,

which is typically thought to presuppose the possibility of individual choice (Dennett, 1984).

Our third and final point of comparison concerns the *level of analysis*. In Bourdieu's theory, practice is shaped through micro- and macro-level phenomena. The interplay between these two levels has to be taken into account in order to explain why actors engage in pro-social activities. In contrast to that, all existing approaches focus either on the micro- or on the macro-level. Whereas Porter (2002) and Hart (1995) do not address the individual level at all, the economic approach and the two stakeholder theories treat managers and organizations as identical entities; the terms 'manager' and 'corporation' become interchangeable (Orlitzky et al., 2011). On that basis these approaches assume that corporations act homologously, which leads to a conceptualization of CSR as a corporate activity. Apart from these two, other approaches also tend to focus on only one level of analysis. Both the integrative social contract theory and the managerial utility approach address only the individual level. The former explains pro-social behaviour on the basis of the duty of managers to adhere to hypernorms; the latter refers to managers' individual preference structures.

The only theories that systematically address more than one level of analysis are the political and the institutional approaches to CSR. The former focuses on the corporation's role in society. Corporations are expected to become democratized and involved in political processes in order to fulfil their political function in a globalized world. Nevertheless, by concentrating on the organizational and societal levels of analysis, the political approach tends to neglect the level of individual actors. Similarly, the institutionalist approach focuses on the interplay between organizations and their institutional fields by drawing a complex picture of how pro-social practices are influenced by the wider institutional structures in which they are embedded. However, it overemphasizes the macro-perspective, reducing the influence of individual agency to a minimum (Tempel and Walgenbach, 2007).

In contrast to the above, our Bourdieusian approach examines how both the micro- and the macro-level influence pro-social behaviour: pro-social activities result from a combination of the micro-level dispositions of individual actors and the macro-structures of the field, which include illusio and the distribution of capital. This makes it possible to account for the structures of markets, politics and social identities without having to ignore the influence of individual preferences. In addition, the Bourdieusian approach shifts the attention to the interplay between micro- and macro-level forces, acknowledging that both levels have to be taken into account and specifying how they interrelate.

In sum, our approach can be seen as a fruitful addition to the existing approaches to CSR. Its strength lies particularly in its ability to provide a more holistic framework for analysing what prompts actors to engage in CSR activities by emphasizing the interplay between economic and non-economic motivations and acknowledging both micro- and macro-influences, as well as voluntaristic and deterministic aspects of human behaviour; in other words, by focusing on the 'daily experiences and moral problems of real people in their everyday life' (Tronto, 1993: 79).

2.4.2 Opportunities for further developments of the Bourdieusian approach to CSR

In this paper we have described the key building blocks of a Bourdieusian approach to CSR. For the full potential of this novel approach to be unleashed, further research is necessary. In the following we will highlight three aspects in particular: (1) the relations between different fields, (2) pluralism and divergence in organizational fields and (3) the relations between different (pro-social and other) practices.

First, in our description of the Bourdieusian approach to CSR we have focused particularly on the structures and dynamics within an individual field. The field was thereby portrayed as largely autonomous; i.e. as a relatively independent universe, characterized by unique stakes and distinctive dynamics. Nevertheless, as Bourdieu (1990) stressed, different fields might possess different degrees of autonomy. Some fields might be self-determined while others might be significantly influenced by other related fields. In view of that, future research might explore how the capital acquisition of actors in one organizational field might influence their position (i.e. their stakes and acquisition of capital) and thus their practices in another field. Similarly, it would be worth exploring how an actor's practices in an organizational field are affected by that actor's habitus when that is shaped by the structure, and especially the illusio, of other fields. Exploring these potential influences across field boundaries could provide additional insights into the mechanisms through which attitudes towards pro-social practices may change. This would allow us to capture the effects that, for example, social movements (Crossley, 2003) or political manoeuvres (Bourdieu, 1998) in adjacent fields might have on pro-social behaviour in a particular organizational field. Examples of key questions in this line of inquiry are: how do changes in related fields influence the power structures in a given organizational field? How does this affect the conditions under which actors within that

organizational field undertake pro-social initiatives? Also, which factors determine whether and to what extent external changes affect the organizational field?

Second, we based our Bourdieusian approach to CSR on the assumption that all practices within a particular field are subject to the same illusio. This suggests that in each organizational field there is only one mode of evaluating pro-social behaviours. However, in the era of globalization and with the prevalence of multinational corporations operating in pluralistic contexts (Scherer et al., forthcoming), the assumption of a single and consistent illusio that guides the evaluations of pro-social practices becomes somewhat problematic. For that reason, future research needs to explore the potential co-existence of several illusiones within the same field, as a result of which pro-social practices might be evaluated differently – for instance, while some dominant actors might regard particular pro-social practices as legitimate, other dominant actors might take a different view. Examples of key questions in this line of inquiry are: how can we conceptualize the co-existence of different illusiones within the same field? How do different illusiones relate to each other and how do they affect the structures of power? How do multiple illusiones affect the legitimacy and development of different pro-social practices? Finally, how does the co-existence of different illusiones affect the likelihood of false, rather than true, representations of pro-social practices?

A third area that needs to be explored further is the way in which different (pro-social and other) practices relate to each other. As is fairly self-evident, an organizational practice is not enacted in isolation but in the context of other practices. Exploring the potential relations between different practices might provide important insights into the likelihood that particular pro-social practices may be adopted. We could distinguish crudely between neutral, complementary and conflicting relations between practices. For instance, practices that enhance the transparency of the organization with the aim of fighting corruption and practices that are aimed at defending the privacy of corporate members are likely to conflict. Similarly, auditing and inspection practices might undermine the practice of false representation that corporations may employ in relation to CSR. Examples of complementary practices are ISO standards for CSR. Typically there is an overlap between the various requirements for certification, so adopting several standards is easier for companies than adopting a single standard (see e.g., Corbett and Kirsch, 2001). Examples of key questions in this line of inquiry are: what types of relations can be distinguished between different practices? How does illusio affect the way in which different practices interrelate? How does the way in which various practices interrelate affect the likelihood that a particular pro-social practice

may be adopted? Also, how does the way in which practices interrelate affect the extent to which organizations misrepresent their pro-social behaviour?

2.5 Conclusion

We started this article by asking why corporate actors engage in pro-social behaviour and suggesting that Bourdieu's theory of social practice is particularly well suited to exploring this question because it allows researchers to examine the interplay between the economic and non-economic motivations that underlie such behaviour. Our Bourdieusian approach conceptualizes pro-social behaviour as the transformation of economic capital into other forms of capital. Whether this transformation is likely to occur or not depends on which forms of capital are of value in a given field. In turn, the value of capital rests on its social recognition by dominant actors. Bourdieu understood social life as an ongoing struggle for power; in that respect, pro-social behaviour may function as a weapon or stake if it increases the corporate actors' capital. Thus, overall, our Bourdieusian perspective contributes to a novel understanding of economic and non-economic explanations of pro-social behaviour.

Furthermore, our Bourdieusian approach shifts the attention to two broader issues: first, in order to grasp the link between broader societal structures and habitually shaped perceptions, it suggests that pro-social behaviour should be seen as a form of social practice. In this sense, pro-social behaviour is neither deterministically prescribed by the organizational context nor is it free and autonomous; it is an artful interpretation of that context (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002). This highlights the hardly discussed aspect of consciousness and of the ability of individuals to reflect on their pro-social behaviour. Second, our approach is in line with recent calls for examining CSR on multiple levels (Heugens and Scherer, 2010; Orlitzky et al., 2011): focusing on a single level of analysis is not an adequate way of achieving a more realistic account of what drives CSR behaviour. Using Bourdieu's theory as a conceptual framework inevitably broadens the scope of research to include the interplay between individual actors and organizational fields in the context of CSR. As Whittington (2011: 185) recently pointed out, 'practice–theoretic research can never be purely "micro" or "macro"; the other is always present'.

Although the Bourdieusian approach developed in this paper provides new insights into pro-social behaviour, it is not meant to substitute other theoretical perspectives on this topic. Like all theoretical perspectives, it has, inevitably, certain limitations. More specifically, by

assuming that the pursuit of capital can explain all pro-social behaviour, it possibly tends to overemphasize the role of power in human action. It should also be noted that this is certainly not the only way to apply Bourdieu's theory to CSR as there are many different readings of his work (King, 2000; Schatzki, 1987). At the same time, we believe that, by shedding new light on the drivers of pro-social bahviour and thus triggering a host of exciting new questions that await exploration, our approach will prove particularly fruitful to future research.

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3 Does practice-based research on strategy lead to practically relevant knowledge? Implications of a Bourdieusian perspective

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Abstract[8]

It has often been argued by scholars adopting a practice approach that by focusing on "what people do in relation to strategy" their research would be particularly relevant to practitioners. In response to this assumption, this paper draws on a Bourdieusian perspective to argue that most practice-based strategy scholars are unaware of their inevitably "scholastic view" which is the cause for the gap between strategy research and praxis. This unawareness leads to two related fallacies: epistemic doxa and scholastic ethnocentrism. In order to avoid these fallacies, strategy researchers need to develop a particular kind of reflexivity by engaging in what is known as "participant objectivation". This enables the researcher to generate rigorous research that is conceptually relevant to practitioners – without dissolving the necessary differentiation between strategy research and praxis.

Keywords

Bourdieu, rigor–relevance, reflexivity, strategy-as-practice, strategy research

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3.1 Introduction

Over the last two decades, strategy researchers have increasingly voiced concern about the irrelevance of strategy research to management praxis (e.g. Bettis, 1991; Hafsi & Thomas, 2005; Løwendahl & Revang, 1998; Lyles 1995). This is a particularly serious concern to most strategy scholars since strategy research – more so than many other areas of organization studies – has always put particular emphasis on its status as an "applied science". In that respect, it can be argued that the "legitimacy" of strategy research also depends on its ability to demonstrate its practical relevance (Bower, 1982; Gopinath & Hoffman, 1995; Lyles, 1995). One interesting response to this criticism has been the development of a practice-based approach to strategy that has been variously labelled "activity-based view", "micro-strategy", "strategizing perspective" or "strategy as practice" (Golsorki et al., 2010; Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Johnson et al., 2003, 2007). While the emergence of this new approach to strategy certainly cannot be attributed exclusively to the general concerns about the practical relevance of research, such concerns are a central issue in most discussions about this approach. For instance, in the seminal special issue on the practice-based approach to strategy, Johnson and his colleagues state that the pressure to generate knowledge that is relevant to praxis is a "strong instrumental reason for the importance of a more micro activity based view of strategy" (Johnson et al., 2003, p. 5). This claim has been iterated in various publications on the practice-based approach to strategy (e.g. Golsorkhi et al., 2010; Jarzabkowski & Whittington, 2008; Johnson et al., 2007; Whittington et al., 2003).

The concept of strategy as something that managers do, rather than as something that firms have, is central to the practice-based approach to strategy (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Johnson et al., 2003, 2007). As such, practice-based research in strategy is concerned with the daily activities of strategy practitioners and the way these relate to strategic outcomes (Johnson et al., 2003). In this sense, the practice-based approach constitutes an attempt to get close to practitioners and their activities in order to gain a deeper understanding of what actually happens when people engage in practices such as strategic planning, strategy workshops, strategy reviews etc. (Whittington, 1996).

According to the practice-based approach, it is this closeness to the strategy practitioner and his or her practices that holds the key to increasing the practical relevance of strategy research. As Orlikowski writes, practice-based research seeks to "bridge the gap" between scientific knowledge and lived reality "by engaging more deeply in the empirical details of

organizational life on the ground" (Orlikowski, 2010, p. 24). In the same context, Whittington remarks: "It is hard to believe that rigorous research into what people 'really do in strategy' does not have the potential for considerable practical value" (Johnson et al., 2007, p. 220). Yet, despite the explicit concern for practical relevance, there are hardly any systematic epistemological reflections on the conditions and possibilities of generating practically relevant knowledge through this approach in the practice-based literature (with the notable exception of a small study by Jarzabkowski and Wilson, 2006). Thus, it is unclear to what extent and under what conditions practice-based research would prove relevant to practitioners.

This paper is a response to the perceived gap in the practice-based literature on strategy. In particular, it addresses the following research question: to what extent is the claim about the particular practical relevance of practice-based strategy research justified? In the course of answering this question we will discuss the epistemological presuppositions and preconditions of the claim that practice-based strategy research is relevant to management praxis. For this purpose, we will draw on the theory of Pierre Bourdieu, which will provide us with an epistemological framework for analyzing the relation between strategy research and praxis.

Bourdieu's theory of social practices – in particular his concepts of "skholè" (Bourdieu, 1988), "social fields" (Bourdieu, 1990a) and "participant objectivation" (Bourdieu, 2003) – lends itself particularly well to our analysis for two reasons: firstly, Bourdieu himself applied his practice theory to the field of social science (Bourdieu, 1988) and its relation to other areas of human activity (e.g. Bourdieu 1996a, 1996b, 2005); secondly, practice-based research (e.g. Chia & MacKay, 2007; Gomez, 2010; Jarzabkowski, 2004) has already drawn extensively on the works of Bourdieu (who ranks as one of the main practice theorists together with Giddens, deCerteau and Foucault). Nevertheless, so far the epistemological implications of Bourdieu's theory for the relation between strategy research and strategy praxis have not been systematically explored.

Based on Bourdieu's theory it can be argued that the gap between strategy research and management praxis cannot be resolved just by focussing on the activities of practitioners. In addition to such a focus, practice-based studies need to take into account their inevitably "scholastic view" (Bourdieu, 1975, 2001) – i.e. a particular point of view resulting from the researcher's detached position towards the object of research. If that is not the case, practice-based studies will produce knowledge that might neither be practically relevant nor contribute to the advancement of strategy research. We will argue that only by developing a particular

form of reflexivity, which Bourdieu referred to as "participant objectivation", are researchers able to produce valid scientific knowledge about strategy praxis which may also prove relevant to strategy practitioners. From a Bourdieusian point of view, relevance to practitioners can thus only be achieved through a particular form of rigor.

The remainder of this paper is structured into six sections. After this introduction, we first position our own paper within the different streams of argumentation in the debate on the possibilities and limitations of generating practically relevant knowledge in organization studies. In the second section we introduce Bourdieu's practice theory as the theoretical framework that will underpin our analysis of the relation between strategy science and praxis. It will be shown that strategy research and strategy praxis can be conceptualized as two different social fields which are characterized by different structures. In the third section we discuss two typical fallacies which often result from the differentiation between the field of science and management praxis. In the fourth section we propose Bourdieu's concept of reflexivity through "participant objectivation" as a way of avoiding these two fallacies. In the fifth section we discuss the possibility of conducting management research so that it has practical relevance despite the differences between the fields of strategy research and praxis. We conclude with reflections on the contributions of this study.

3.2 Review of the literature on practical relevance

The academic debate about the possibilities and limitations of producing practically relevant knowledge in management science has generated a large body of literature (the so-called "relevance literature"), in which we can discern three streams based on different conceptualizations of knowledge: a technical-linear approach, a systemic-discursive approach and a practice-theory approach.

Authors who follow what can be termed the technical-linear approach (Rasche & Behnam, 2009; Jarzabkowski et al., 2010) have a comparatively simple concept of knowledge. Knowledge is conceptualized as an abstract, objective representation of the external reality, which can be transferred directly from one context to another (Nicolai, 2004). Management scholars are perceived to be in a superior position to generate valid knowledge about management praxis, due to their specialization in research. The empirical fact that scientific knowledge is hardly taken notice of by managers is explained by 'technical' problems, which – in principle – can all be solved. These problems have to do with either the production of knowledge or its transfer from the scientists to the practitioners. Those authors in the group

who focus on the knowledge transfer argue that research results need to be better communicated to practitioners, with relation to both the availability of scientific knowledge and the language in which it is encoded. Authors who take this view have made suggestions as to how scientific results should be presented in practice-oriented journals and recommendations to fellow authors, which include presenting more informative "implications" sections in research papers, changing their writing style or using researchers as translators (Baldrige et al., 2004; Mintzberg, 2004; Barley et al., 1988; Buckley et al., 1998; Cohen, 2007; Hambrick, 2005; Mohrman et al., 2001; Reynes et al., 2007; Starkey & Madan, 2001). It is typically assumed by these authors that 'knowledge produced by academics is relevant and valid but not perceived as such by practitioners' (Rasche/Behnam 2009: 245).

Those authors in the group who focus on the problems of knowledge-production argue that researchers either address the wrong problems or address them in a wrong way: researchers typically derive their research problems from critical discussions of the works of other researchers rather than from the concerns of practitioners (Bettis, 1991; Rynes et al., 1999). In order to ensure that research is focused on the practical concerns of managers, some scholars have called for reforms in business schools aimed at creating incentives for practitioner-oriented research (Huff & Huff, 2001). Others have propagated various forms of collaborative research designs (such as "Engaged Scholarship" or "Mode 2"), in which researchers collaborate with practitioners in order to define and work on research problems (Gibbons et al., 1994; MacIntosh & MacLean, 2008; Van de Ven & Johnson, 2006). Even though the authors in this stream of literature for the most part do not discuss their concept of knowledge explicitly, a closer analysis clearly reveals that they assume a linear model of knowledge exchange (Kieser & Leiner, 2009). Consequently, they do not perceive any conflict between the pursuit of scientific rigor and practical relevance. Overall, they lack an "understanding of the entire complexity of the problem of relevance" (Rasche & Behnam, 2009, p. 245).

In contrast to the technical-linear approach, the so-called systemic-discursive approach (Seidl, 2007) emphasizes the dependence of knowledge on context. Drawing on the works of authors such as Luhmann or Lyotard, scholars in this stream of research argue that the lack of transfer of knowledge from management science to management praxis is the inevitable result of the differentiation between these as two communication systems, each functioning according to its own logic: the logic inherent in knowledge that is generated within science is different from that which underlies knowledge generated within management praxis (Astley & Zammuto, 1992; Kieser & Leiner, 2009; Seidl, 2009). As a consequence, scientific

knowledge is seen as incommensurate with practical knowledge (Astley & Zammuto, 1992): management science cannot produce knowledge that is relevant to management praxis. In order to produce practically relevant knowledge researchers would have to adjust to the logic of management praxis: however, if they did so, their research would no longer be regarded as science (Kieser & Leiner, 2009; Rasche & Behnam, 2009; Seidl, 2007). From the system-discursive perspective, the practical irrelevance of management science is not a problem to be resolved. On the contrary, only because of the differentiation between management science and praxis, and, thus, the impossibility of any direct transfer of knowledge, can science progress. Accordingly, there is a clear trade-off between scientific rigor and practical relevance (Nicolai, 2004). This is not to say that authors of this stream of literature dismiss the idea that scientific results might have an effect on management praxis, but maintain that such effects are based on a "misunderstanding", even though these misunderstandings might be productive to some degree (Seidl, 2009).

Over the last few years, a small stream of literature has emerged, which propagates a practice-theory perspective on the issue of practical relevance. The authors (Golsorkhi et al., 2009; Jarzabkowski & Wilson, 2006; Jarzabkowski et al., 2010; Sandberg & Tsoukas, forthcoming) draw particularly on practice theorists such as Heidegger, Bourdieu and Schatzki. Similarly to the systemic-discursive approach, the practice-theory approach treats management science and management praxis as different social spheres, which exhibit different structures associated with different types of knowledge. Yet, in contrast to the systemic-discursive approach, the spheres of the academics and practitioners are not treated as "operatively closed" systems (Kieser & Leiner 2009; Seidl 2007; 2009) but as permeable fields. In the former approach, scientific operations belong to the scientific system because they function according to the logic of this system and as such are part of this system (otherwise they would not constitute scientific operations). In the latter approach, scientific practices function according to the "logic of practice" which is the same for all social fields. Hence, both strategy science and strategy praxis share the same underlying logic but they differ in the particular structures according to which the respective practices are shaped.

While the systemic-discursive approach is primarily focused on the macro-level of analysis, examining primarily the relation between the different systems, the practice-theory approach also emphasizes the importance of the micro-level of the individual actors and their practices (Jarzabkowski & Wilson, 2006; Jarzabkowski et al., 2010). Individual activities are not

merely treated as a reflection of the macro-logic or structures of the scientific system but are also understood as result of the specific intentions and abilities of the individual researchers within the field. Accordingly, scientific strategy knowledge does not reside in the scientific system as such, as the systemic-discursive approach would have it, but it is conceptualized as "part of the [particular] social practices in which strategic actors participate in order to communicate and construct meaning about strategy" (Jarzabkowski & Wilson, 2006, p. 360).

Because it recognizes agency, the practice-theory approach also explicitly acknowledges that researchers can actively reflect on, and take into account in their research, the different social conditions of management science and management praxis (Golsorkhi et al., 2009). However, the particular form this reflection should take and how it impacts on the kind of knowledge generated have not been properly explored so far. In this sense, the publications representing this stream of literature are more of a programmatic nature than providing a developed perspective.

Overall, the practice-theory approach offers a fruitful yet largely unexplored theoretical perspective on the relevance problem. It transcends the somewhat simple view of the technical-linear approach and also goes beyond the mere acknowledgment of the necessary difference between theoretical and practical knowledge espoused by the systemic-discursive view.

3.3 The social field of science and the scholastic view

Like all practice theorists, Bourdieu puts social practices, i.e. the socially shaped activities of actors, at the center of social analysis. Social practices, performed by individual actors, are influenced not only by the actors' individual dispositions (such as origin, education and identity) but also by supra-individual objective structures (such as socially defined interests, beliefs, assumptions and resources). Objective structures are not uniform but vary between different social spheres. Bourdieu in this sense speaks of different "social fields" such as politics, economy and academia (Bourdieu, 2002). Depending on the particular social field in which actors carry out their activities, they are faced with different structural possibilities and constraints: they are guided by different field-specific interests, beliefs and assumptions, and have at their disposal particular sets of resources (Bourdieu, 1984, 1996a; Golsorkhi et al., 2009; Nahapiet & Goshal, 1998; Swartz, 2008). Consequently, moving from one field to another implies a shift in the structural conditions of an actor's practices.

Against this background, we can conceptualize management science (and strategy research in particular) and management praxis as different social fields characterized by different objective structures (Bourdieu 1990a; Bouty & Gomez, 2007; Golsorkhi et al., 2010). Although some objective structures may cut across the two fields (e.g. education as an area of interest and as a resource), most structures are specific to the particular field. For example, in the field of academia actors are guided by particular interests, e.g. publications in academic journals, while in the field of management praxis they are guided by managerial interests, such as increasing sales figures. The two fields also possess different resources, for which the actors in each field compete. The main resource in the academic field is scientific authority:

> 'Scientific authority [is] defined inseparably as technical capacity and social power, or, to put it another way, the monopoly of scientific competence, in the sense of a particular agent's socially recognised capacity to speak and act legitimately [...] in scientific matters.' (Bourdieu, 1975, p. 19)

All scientific practices – for example the practice of publishing – are directed towards the acquisition of scientific authority (Bourdieu, 1975; Kieser & Leiner, 2009). As Jarzabkowski and colleagues (2010, p. 8) put it: "Academics are also practitioners – of scholarly pursuit. Their practices [...] reflect their interests and occur within an institutional setting that they shape and from which they derive meaning." In this sense, the practices of academics (e.g. the production of scientific knowledge) are guided by different interests and resources from those that guide practices in other fields.

The field-specific interests and resources are related to the actors' assumptions of what is of value in the respective field (Sandberg & Tsoukas, forthcoming). Bourdieu terms the interests and resources considered to be of shared value as the "illusio" of that particular field, i.e. the tacit recognition of the unconsciously shared valuations of interests, resources and beliefs (Bourdieu, 2001).

In the field of science, for example, the unconsciously shared understanding guides scholars – as members of the academic field – in their judgment of what is considered scientifically relevant. Scholars of one field, share an understanding which makes the practices of other members meaningful and deemed appropriate (Bourdieu, 2001; Golsorkhi et al., 2009). The resources that produce scientific knowledge are thus not abstract, but resources-in-practice embodied and enacted by a scholar's practices (Chia, 2004; Chia & MacKay, 2007; Cook & Brown, 1999; Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2009; Tsoukas & Knudsen, 2002). Analogously, in the

field of managerial praxis all practices receive their specific meanings and intelligibility from being enacted in that particular field (Chia & Holt, 2006; Orlikowski 1997).

Another central aspect of the field structure is “doxa” (Bourdieu, 1998b). Doxa describes the axiomatic assumptions that field-members share about their reality. Field-specific assumptions are perceived as self-evident and are not questioned as such (Bourdieu, 1998b, 2004). In this sense, doxa determines the field-specific understanding of reality. Doxa therefore guides the members’ interpretations of the world by excluding any practice that would “go against the taken-for-granted assumptions” (Golsorkhi et al., 2009, p. 785). Like all others, the academic field possesses a particular doxa, because of which the structure of scholars’ practices and the conditions in the academic field are perceived as natural. As a consequence, the practices of scholars are only considered appropriate to the field of science if they conform to the field-specific structure. Similarly, while research that complies with the structure of the field of management science is likely to be recognized by members of that field as important and interesting, it is unlikely to be recognized as such by members of other fields – such as managers – because their practices do not comply with the structure of management science. This implies that research focusing on practical relevance rather than academic relevance addresses actors “outside the field [and therefore] cannot fail to incur discredit” (Bourdieu, 1975, p. 23).

The particular structure of the academic field gives rise to a particular condition that Bourdieu terms “skholè” which he defines as the “time liberated from practical occupations and preoccupations of the world [which makes] a relation to the world possible that is liberated from practical urgencies” (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 10). Thus, in contrast to actors in other fields, particularly in the field of management praxis, academics engaged in management research are freed from time pressure and pressure to act. According to Bourdieu (1988), it is this particular condition that allows researchers in general to conduct their studies, so, in a sense, it is skholè that makes science possible at all.

In the context of management science and management praxis this particular condition also leads to a specific way of observing the world, which differs significantly from that of actors in other fields (Chia & MacKay, 2007). Bourdieu refers to this mode of observation as the “scholastic view” (Bourdieu, 1975, 2001), which applies to all knowledge produced in the academic field. This is already evident in the way that language is used in science:

> ‘Instead of grasping and mobilizing the meaning of a word that is immediately compatible with the situation, we mobilize and examine all the possible meanings of that word, outside of any reference to the situation. [...] The scholastic view is a very peculiar point of view on the social world, on language, on any possible object of thought.’ (Bourdieu, 1998b, p. 127)

To give an example, the term “strategy” is used in strategy research in a very particular way, which differs considerably from the way it is used by practitioners in strategy praxis (Grand et al., 2010; Paroutis & Heracleous, 2010).

The scholastic view implies a distance between strategy research and strategy praxis. Bourdieu and Wacquant talk about “an abstraction of the world to think about the world” (1992, p. 78); in other words, about a social distance which originates in the difference between the social conditions of the academic field and those of praxis. Thus, the knowledge generated by scientists is mostly disconnected from the “meaningful totality into which practitioners are immersed, [its] situational uniqueness that is characteristic of the tasks practitioners do [and] from time as experienced by practitioners” (Sandberg & Tsoukas, forthcoming, p. 10). Scientific knowledge tends to be directed at universality and timelessness, which erases many conditions that are necessary to practical enactment (Golsorkhi et al., 2009; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2011). As Augier and March assert:

> ‘Knowledge derived from practical experience tends to emphasize immediacy and applicability in a specific context. It is ordinarily more focused in time and space than is academic scholarship. Conversely, the academic perspective tends to emphasize the timelessness and generality of its relevance.’ (Augier & March, 2007, p. 130)

In that sense, the generation of knowledge by academics often entails the neutralization of practical urgencies – such as the ability to identify problems for the sole pleasure of resolving them and not because they are posed by the necessities of life (Bourdieu, 2001; Brown & Duguid, 1991; Cascio & Aguinis, 2008).

Against this background, the lack of practical relevance of large parts of strategy research can be seen to a great extent as a result of the scholastic distance of researchers from management praxis. At the same time, however, the field of management praxis can only be analyzed from a position outside itself. The scholastic abstraction is necessary to reveal the objective structures underlying managers’ practices. Ironically, the scholastic view, on the one hand, enables scientific knowledge and on the other hand, because of its distance to praxis, is inverse to praxis (Bourdieu, 1975, 1990b). The difference between management research (and the practice-based approach to strategy in particular) and praxis – and thus between the

observer and the observed – lies in the relationship between knowing and doing and between the objective structures and conditions of the two fields. At the same time, the difference between management science and management praxis is the sine qua non condition for the existence of the academic field. By examining managerial praxis from a scholastic point of view, practice-based research is necessarily detached from "what people do in relation to strategy" and thus from the practical logic of strategists. Ignoring the scholastic distance between researcher and strategy practitioner inevitably results in so-called scholastic fallacies, which we will discuss in the next section.

3.4 The fallacies of epistemic doxa and scholastic enthnocentrism

The implications of the scholastic view for the generation of knowledge have always been of central concern to Bourdieu (2004; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). As a consequence of not taking into consideration its distance from praxis, research tends to be both directed solely at other researchers and disconnected from practitioners and their concerns.

The scholastic view tends to result in research that falls prey to two interrelated fallacies – epistemic doxa and scholastic ethnocentrism. The fallacy of epistemic doxa consists in the researchers' unawareness of their scholastic view, whereas scholastic ethnocentrism is the projection of the scholastic view into the object of research.

Bourdieu argues that most researchers are unaware of their scholastic view and their corresponding abstractions from "praxis" due to their doxa (Bourdieu, 2004; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). The typical modes of academic interpretation and understanding of the world are taken-for-granted and not questioned (Bouty & Gomez, 2007; Golsorkhi et al., 2009). Academics, it is argued, are inevitably "placed outside of the object [of their study and] observe it from afar and from above" (Wacquant, 1989, p. 37). The fallacy of epistemic doxa (Bourdieu, 1998a, p. 215) refers to the academics' unawareness of the effect that this has on their studies. As Bourdieu says, scholars tend to display their doxa as they overlook the social presuppositions inscribed in the scholastic point of view (Bourdieu, 1990b,1998a; Golsorkhi et al., 2009); that is, when they fail to question the assumptions of their thoughts and thus the social conditions of the possibility of the scholastic point of view.

Several practice-based studies have shown that practices are always embedded in contexts whose meaning is constituted by people, their actions and interrelated objects (Gherardi, 2006; Jarzabkowski & Kaplan, 2008; Nicolini et al., 2003), and that the timing of and for

action is important (Buchanan, 1999; Orr, 1996). Nevertheless, many of those who assume that their deep engagement with "what people do in relation to strategy" results in an improvement of strategizing praxis (Langley, 2010) leave their own presuppositions and assumptions unquestioned, and, consequently, become subjected to epistemic doxa. As long as the conditions of the scholastic view are not identified, it is impossible to capture the strategist's logic of practice. Therefore, if researchers are genuinely concerned with identifying the social practices of strategists, they ought to reflect explicitly on their own conditions of conducting their studies (In the next section we will show some examples of practice-based studies that display such a level of reflexion.) For Bourdieu, the logic of strategists' practices can only be understood through the researchers' awareness of their own cognitive constructions related to doxa. As Bourdieu explains:

> 'The logic in which I reason is [...] that of epistemological questioning. This is a fundamental epistemological question since it bears on the epistemic posture itself, on the presuppositions inscribed in the fact of thinking the world, of retiring from the world and from action in the world in order to think that action.' (Bourdieu, 1998b, p. 129).

In other words, according to Bourdieu, practice-based researchers who do not reflect on their scientific logic and the social conditions that make their research possible cannot gain an understanding of the logic of the practice they are studying. As a result, it is unlikely that practitioners will be able to make much sense of the respective research results.

The abstraction from praxis is likely to result also in a second, related, scholastic fallacy, namely scholastic ethnocentrism (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 50). This occurs when researchers fail to analyze the scholastic point of view that they adopt towards their objects, i.e. the gap between their own social conditions and those which underlie the practices they study (Bourdieu, 2004; Wacquant, 1989). Practice-based research on strategy is confronted with the difference between two socially constructed modes of comprehension of the world (Augier & March, 2007; Bourdieu, 1998a; Weick, 1999): the scholastic one, which researchers, due to their doxa, tacitly set up as the norm that underlies their practices, and the practical one, which a researcher has "in common with men and women seemingly very distant from him in time and social space, and in which he cannot recognise the practical mode of knowledge [...] which is also his own in the most ordinary acts and experiences of ordinary existence" (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 51). Scholastic ethnocentrism leads researchers to ignore the practical logic of their own as well as the practitioners' practices by implying – mostly in a theoretical

manner (Jarzabkowski & Wilson, 2006) – that the observed practices are liable to the scholastic – in contrast to the practical – mode of knowledge.

Practice-based researchers therefore risk attributing to their objects of research social aspects which are, in fact, just a result of their particular way of observing them (Golsorkhi et al., 2009). This also applies to practice-based strategy research, which brings strategy down to the level of the activities of human beings interacting in observable situations (Chia & MacKay, 2007; Langley, 2010; Whittington, 2006). Many researchers inadvertently project their own scholastic thinking into the heads of strategists assuming that strategists think in the same scholastic way as they do (Bourdieu, 1998a). As a result, researchers run the risk of regarding the scientific concepts through which they explain the activities of practitioners as the actual cause of these activities (Scherer, 2003).

Unreflective practice-based research will just reproduce a scholastic view of practitioners. When practice-based research falls prey to the fallacies of epistemic doxa and scholastic ethnocentrism, its results are neither of relevance to practitioners nor do they constitute rigorous scientific knowledge.

3.5 Participant objectivation as a means of avoiding scholastic fallacies

Bourdieu argued that it is possible to avoid the fallacies resulting from the scholastic view by engaging in what he calls "participant objectivation" (Bourdieu, 1978, 1990c, 2003). Participant objectivation is a means of objectivizing the researcher's subjective relation to his or her object of research and thus of conducting research that is grounded in the logic of practice. It incorporates the scholastic point of view in social analysis in order "to render explicit what is taken for granted" (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p. 68).

Participant objectivation goes beyond simple self-reference or self-consciousness; it is also clearly opposed to "narcissistic" reflexivity, which redirects the analytical gaze back onto the private person of the analyst (Bourdieu, 2002).

> 'This is to say, in passing, that the kind of [reflexivity] that I advocate has little in common with this kind of complacent and intimist return upon the private person of the sociologist or [...] with this self-fascinated, and a bit complacent, observation of the observer's writings which has recently become something of a fad among […] anthropologists […] who, having become blasé with fieldwork, turn to talking about themselves rather than about their object of research.' (Bourdieu, 1988, p. 65)

Moreover, participant objectivation is not about participating in the fields of praxis or merely reflecting on one's fieldwork - if that were the case, it would result in relativism. Such reflections allow one to say 'after all, this is only the opinion of a so-and-so, of the daughter of a teacher, etc.' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 203). Instead, since practices result from social conditioning, the kind of reflexivity that Bourdieu describes is aimed at acknowledging how the distance from and abstraction of the observed praxis influences the way scholars think (Cicourel, 1993; Jarzabkowski et al., 2010). To do this, practice-based academics have to observe the everyday practices of strategists

> 'with a scientific thought that is aware of itself and its limits to be capable of thinking practice without destroying its object. It is thus to understand what kind of understanding the scholastic thought has of this practical understanding and the difference between practical and scientific knowledge.' (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 50)

For Bourdieu research is only truly reflexive to the extent that scholars engage in participant objectivation: they need to understand, firstly, the social conditions of their own activities as social scientists (Bourdieu, 1990a; Lewandowski, 2000) and, secondly, the practical conditions of the social practices they study (Bourdieu, 1998a, 2001). In other words, they need to adapt the distinction between the scholastic and the practical modes of knowledge to research. In this sense participant objectivation consists of a "[...] process of objectivation of the subject of objectivation" (Bourdieu, 1988, p. 67)

The process of objectivation is an analysis of both the object of research and the role of the researcher (Everett, 2002). In order to objectify the object of research, practice-based academics need to objectify their subjective relation to this object (Bourdieu, 1988). This means that researchers need to analyze their own relation to the object of research and reveal the social conditions that act as scholastic boundaries within which knowledge becomes possible. To overcome the scholastic distance and thus the inherent scholastic fallacies, the "objectivizing distance must be objectivized, theorized within the limits of knowledge itself" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 41). This requires that the researcher resists taking up the absolute point of view towards the object of study that is inherent in the scholastic point of view (Bourdieu, 1978, 2003; Byrne, 2005; Golsorkhi et al., 2009; Scherer, 2003).

The researcher's subjective relation to the object of research must undergo the same critical analysis as the object of research itself. This objectivation of the subjective relation to the object consists on the one hand of the analysis of the objective structures of the scientific field and on the other hand the researcher's individual dispositions. These two (mutually

constitutive and correspondent) aspects determine the researcher's subjective relation to the object of research (Wacquant, 2006). The researcher's individual dispositions manifest themselves in personal identity and origins (gender, nationality, ethnicity, education, etc.), which affect a researcher's individual "conceptions of social good and preferred ways of living" (Deetz, 1996, p. 204). The objective structures, in turn, concern the particular conditions, the illusio and doxa of the academic field; in particular, that is

> 'its national traditions and peculiarities, its habits of thought, its mandatory problematics, its shared beliefs and commonplaces, its rituals, values, and consecrations, its constraints in matters of publication of findings, its specific censorships, [...] and all the unconscious presuppositions built into the categories of scholarly understanding'. (Bourdieu, 2003, p. 283).

In the field of strategy, this objectivation is the effort of creating an awareness of one's own scientific relation to "what strategists do" and the decisive choices (of topic, method, theory etc.) that this relation entails. This means that the personal choice on how to analyze "what strategists do" and the theoretical and methodological orientations of this analysis are determined by the researchers' social dispositions, in which the structures of the academic field express themselves in a transfigured form (Bourdieu, 2003). In other words, the structures of the academic field – including illusio and doxa – orientate the scientific choices within such an analysis. This is why Bourdieu calls for a critical dissection of the concepts, methods and problems the researcher inherits, which for him constitutes a central aspect of real scientific rigor (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Everett, 2002).

In methodological terms, participant objectivation means that the construction of the object, as well as its subjective relation, requires "methodological polytheism" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) – i.e. the confrontation of one's research results with results obtained through different methods (Wacquant, 2006). In addition, it requires epistemic attention to all operations of research, including the theoretical framework that stipulates a relation between theory and method (Wacquant, 2006).

Good examples of this proposed methodological stance include the practice-based study by Oakes et al. (1998) on organizational control and change, and that by Everett and Jamal (2001) on inter-organizational collaboration: They obtained their research results on the basis of different methods (methodological polytheism) such as document analysis, interviews and organizational observation. This was accompanied by explicit reflections on the prerequisites and conditions of conducting the particular research and enabled them to break with the idea of "representations by all" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 235). In the case of Oakes and

her colleagues, the reflections allowed them to see business planning as a pedagogic practice and as a complex process involving activities which undermined the practitioners' authority, in contrast to the common assumption that business planning is a neutral management technique or a coercive tool of control.

In contrast to these two studies, many other practice-based works on strategy (e.g. Chia & Holt, 2009; Gomez, 2010; Johnson, Balogun & Beech, 2010; Whittington, 2003; Jarzabkowski & Wilson, 2006) are reflexive merely in terms of examining their research practices without paying attention to the underlying objective structures and individual dispositions. In other words, such works do not acknowledge the logic of practice that governs their own research practices, a process necessary for the genuinely reflexive stance described above (Grand et al. 2008; Jarzabkowski et al., 2010; Sandberg & Tsoukas, forthcoming). Only when practice-based strategy scholars are aware of the limitations inherent in the scholastic point of view, can they realize the limits that underlie their mode of knowledge. As Rasche and Chia note:

> 'The manner in which academically articulated accounts of strategy practice tend to create a schism between such accounts and the very practices they purport to explain is one of the most intractable problems of the research process. Such a schism can only be addressed and rectified through a careful examination of the dominant research dispositions and the nature and limitations of the resultant explanatory outcomes involved.' (Rasche & Chia, 2009, p. 3)

Thus, although many practice-based studies on strategy reflect on the scholastic stance, most of them still fall prey to the scholastic fallacies, because they do not engage in participant objectivation. In this sense, participant objectivation is the reflective scientific study of both "what strategists do" and the relation of researchers to strategists' practices. Only if practice-based researchers reflect on the practical logic of their own social practices as scholars they are able to grasp the logic of practice and overcome the scholastic fallacies. This is possible only to the extent that they objectify their relation to strategists. At the same time, however, scholars who objectify their relation to their research object in this way should not fall "[...] into a form of scholastic illusion of the omnipotence of thought if one were to believe it possible to take an absolute point of view of one's own point of view" (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 119). Participant objectivation shows that individual and structural conditions – methodically controlled – constitute analytic resources and epistemic benefits (Bourdieu, 1990c, 2003) because they enable the researcher to construct scientific objects into which the relation of the researcher to the object – and thus the doxa and illusio – is not unconsciously projected (Golsorkhi et al., 2009). Thus, participant objectivation enables the reconstruction of

scientific knowledge by including the distance between the practical and scholastic modes of knowledge in the scientific analysis. However, as Bourdieu emphasizes:

> 'Critical reflection on the limits of scientific knowledge is not intended to discredit scientific knowledge [...]; but rather to give it a solid basis by freeing it from the distortions arising from the epistemological and social conditions of its production. [It] aims simply to bring to light the theory of practice which scientific knowledge implicitly applies and so to make possible a truly scientific knowledge of practice and of the practical mode of knowledge.' (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 27)

Reflexivity through participant objectivation is crucial to any scientific study of the activities of strategists that aims to be relevant not only academically but also practically. If the scholastic biases are not explicitly acknowledged and addressed, it is unlikely that researchers will be sufficiently aware of their field-specific constraints and, as a result, their research results will not be of much value to the strategy practitioners that they study (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Participant objectivation, hence, aims at breaking through the scholastic view by endowing researchers with an adequate knowledge of that particular point of view, and thus at recognizing the logic of praxis within scholastic thoughts (Bourdieus 2003).

3.6 Possibilities of practical relevance in face of the scholastic view

The possibilities that the results of research can become practically relevant appear quite restricted if we accept the claim that strategy research and strategy praxis not only constitute separate fields with different structures but also, due to the scholastic point of view, produce different kinds of knowledge. Yet, in the context of social sciences, Bourdieu (Wacquant, 2006) argued vehemently against the position of merely aiming to produce knowledge for scientific purposes only. He insisted that the social scientist has a chance and also a duty to produce knowledge that is also of practical relevance. As we saw earlier, according to Bourdieu (2003), the key to practical relevance is participant objectivation.

The method of participant objectivation offers researchers a way of dealing with their inevitably scholastic views, permitting them to identify and react to the influence of those views on their research into managerial practices. It also allows them to lay bare the "logic of practice" of the observed management practices, i.e. to identify managerial practices as such and the particular conditions (i.e. objective structures and individual dispositions) under which they are enacted. In turn, this enables them to describe the possibilities and limitations of enacting these practices. For example, a study of business planning, such as the one by

Oakes and her colleagues (1998), yields insights into the concrete planning practices of managers and the particular conditions that enable or restrict these practices. At first sight, the insights of the research might appear like a mere iteration of the practitioners' knowledge. Yet, this is not the case: these insights represent knowledge that is at the same time "less" and "more" than the knowledge of the practitioner. In the case of our example, it is "less," in the sense that this scientific knowledge does not put the researchers into a position to enact the planning practices themselves; not least because they lack the necessary practical (largely also embodied) skills (Chia & Holt, 2006). However, it is also "more" in the sense that the practitioners are usually not aware of the particular objective structures and individual dispositions under which they enact their practices (Bourdieu, 2003). Even if they tried to identify these conditions they would lack the necessary skholè.

Although this kind of research does not lead to "actionable knowledge" (Jarzabkowski & Wilson, 2006) in the sense of providing guidelines for acting (e.g. for conducting business planning), it can nevertheless be of great practical relevance to the strategy practitioner. If practitioners have access to the results of such research – which could be facilitated, for example, by people active in both fields – they can learn about the particular possibilities and constraints of the conditions within which they enact their practices. This would allow them to recognize alternative ways of performing their practices and thus offer them new choices. In other words, this kind of research can enable practitioners to improve their concrete work practices through a better understanding of the "logic of practice" that underlies their activities.

Consequently, the knowledge that practice-based strategy researchers can provide to practitioners is not likely to be of an instrumental nature, that is, to prescribe particular courses of action that practitioners should follow (Nicolai & Seidl, 2010; Pelz, 1978). Instead, such knowledge would be of conceptual relevance, i.e. identifying how management praxis functions and what constrains it, and in this way would contribute particularly to the "uncovering [of] new or alternative routes of action" (Nicolai & Seidl, 2010). As such, it would not prescribe any particular course of action but merely make the practitioners aware of the available options. This conclusion echoes the study by Sandberg and Tsoukas, who found that researchers can "provide organizational practitioners with resources to look at their organizational practices in a different light and, based on that, be able to create new ways of performing and enacting their practices" (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2011, p. 46).

A comparison of the Bourdieusian perspective with other approaches in the relevance literature reveals some basic similarities but also marked differences: the emphasis that our Bourdieusian approach places on the inevitably scholastic view of researchers as compared to the practical views of management practitioners bears strong similarities to the way in which the systemic-discursive approach conceptualizes the science-praxis relation. Although the two approaches might differ in the details of the description of how science and praxis operate, they concur in that there are fundamental differences between management science and management praxis (identified as differences in "field structures", "systemic logics" or "rules of the game"), which result in fundamental differences between scientifically generated and practically generated knowledge. Because of those differences, a direct transfer of knowledge between the two fields is impossible. Both approaches argue that any attempt to eliminate the "distance" between management science and management praxis would lead to a destruction of management science as a science.

Their similarities notwithstanding, the Bourdieusian approach and the systemic-discursive approach differ markedly in their assumptions regarding the relation between scientific rigor and practical relevance. While the systemic-discursive approach comes to the conclusion that there is a clear trade-off between rigor and relevance in management research (Kieser & Leiner, 2009; Nicolai, 2004; Seidl, 2007), our Bourdieusian approach argues that relevance can be achieved through rigor, i.e. that practical relevance can be actively created by the scientist and that it does not merely constitute a "fiction" (Nicolai 2004; Rasche & Behnam, 2009) or a "productive misunderstanding" (Seidl, 2009). Hence, in contrast to the systemic-discursive approach, which assumes that only practitioners can produce practical knowledge, we argue that scientists can also produce (a particular form of) practical knowledge through rigorous research. This position on the compatibility of rigor and relevance might initially sound similar to the technical-linear approach. However, this would be a severe misinterpretation: the two approaches differ markedly in both the concept of rigor and the concept of relevance. According to Bourdieu, it is only a particular form of rigor (i.e. rigor based on participant objectivation) that is associated with practical relevance. Otherwise, rigor – as perceived by the technical-linear approach – would clearly conflict with relevance, as a result of the scholastic view. In contrast to the technical-linear approach, we also have to dismiss the possibility of generating instrumentally relevant knowledge: instead, relevance has to be understood in terms of conceptually relevant knowledge. In this respect, the Bourdieusian perspective and the technical-linear approach could not be more opposite. Nevertheless, both approaches agree that any knowledge of potentially practical relevance

produced by management science would need to be communicated effectively to practitioners, which presupposes an active effort on the researcher's part. While space does not allow us to deal extensively with this aspect in the present paper, it was definitely of explicit concern to Bourdieu (Wacquant, 1989).

3.7 Conclusion and contributions

We started this paper with the question: to what extent is the claim about the particular practical relevance of practice-based strategy research justified? Drawing on a Bourdieusian perspective we argued that the practice-based approach to strategy typically produces knowledge that is distant from management praxis. Consequently, in the first instance the claim that practice-based strategy research is of particular relevance to practitioners seems unjustified. It is only when practice-based studies are based on a particularly demanding form of reflexivity, in which scholars of this area have so far rarely engaged, that these studies have the potential to generate practically relevant knowledge. Such knowledge, however, is likely to be relevant not in an instrumental sense, i.e. in the sense of prescribing particular courses of action, but rather in a conceptual sense, by allowing practitioners to gather information on the possibilities and constraints on strategy praxis. Thus, the overall answer to this paper's research question can be put as follows: practice-based strategy research does have the potential to produce particularly relevant knowledge but (1) only in a conceptual, not in an instrumental sense and (2) only if it is based on a particular form of reflexivity.

With this argument we make contributions to two sets of literature: first, our study contributes to the practice-based strategy literature, in that it discusses one of its central claims that practice-based strategy research leads to knowledge which is of practical relevance to management practitioners. In particular, we have pointed out the potential fallacies of the practice-based approach and shown how these fallacies can be avoided through participant objectivation. In this way, we contribute to the advancement of this line of strategy research by suggesting ways of increasing its potential to generate more valid scientific results, as well as to offer practitioners knowledge that is relevant to their strategy praxis. Secondly, we contribute to the epistemological literature on the relation between management science and praxis (the so-called "relevance literature") by introducing and spelling out the practice-theory approach on relevance and its concrete implications for research, which had been called for in several recent programmatic papers (Golsorkhi et al., 2009; Jarzabkowski & Wilson, 2006; Jarzabkowski et al., 2010). In particular, we have shown that, in contrast to the argument of

the systemic-discursive approach, a particular form of scientific rigor can indeed be combined with practical relevance. More precisely, we have shown that practical relevance can only be achieved through a particular form of scientific rigor. Accordingly, it seems possible to adhere to a view of strategy research as an applied discipline without having to revert to the somewhat simple view of the technical-linear approach.

This has also important implications for editorial and educational policies. As many studies have shown, academic journals (Kieser & Leiner, 2009) and post-graduate education (Baldrige, 2004; Starkey, 2001) are necessarily focused on scientific rigor rather than practical relevance – even though the written policy statements might claim otherwise (Nicolai & Seidl 2010). Yet, as our paper has shown, this emphasis on rigor might itself lead to an increase in practical relevance: if journal editors and university teachers start to consider participant objectivation a precondition of rigorous research, they will push for this form of reflexivity and – as a result – increase the practical relevance of that research. To be sure, this still leaves the problem of how to communicate scientific knowledge to the practitioners as they tend not to read scientific publications (Kieser & Leiner; 2009).

To sum up, our study has shown that the divide between strategy scholars and strategy practitioners can be "bridged" epistemologically on the basis of a particular form of reflexivity on behalf of the scientist. However, „bridging", here, does not mean doing away with the differentiation between the two fields, e.g. in the form of scholar-practitioner collaborations. Instead, bridging takes place without scientists or practitioners necessarily crossing fields. By engaging in "participant objectivation" researchers can capture the logic of strategy praxis and in this way lay bare the possibilities and constraints within which strategy practices are enacted. As such, the scientific knowledge can inform the practitioner about new or alternative routes of action.

While we focused our paper particularly on practice-based strategy research, many of our arguments can certainly be extended to other areas of management science: every organization scholar inevitably adopts a scholastic view and therefore risks committing scholastic fallacies. Moreover, participant objectivation as a reflexive stance is not restricted to the practice-based approach but also applies to some extent to other approaches in the social sciences. In this sense, all organization scholars may benefit from an acknowledgement of the Bourdieusian view on the relation of science and praxis.

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4 The practical relevance of management research from the practitioners' perspective

Violetta Splitter

Abstract

Even though the literature on practical relevance holds that practical relevance is actively constructed by practitioners who make academic knowledge relevant according to their organizational contexts and existing knowledge, the practitioners' perspective on relevance has received very little attention from researchers interested in the practical relevance of management research. Drawing on practitioners' accounts of the relevance of academic concepts, this paper examines under what conditions practitioners consider academic knowledge as practically relevant. A theoretical model of practitioners' relevance construction is developed that shows that practitioners consider academic knowledge as relevant if they (1) match academic knowledge against their contextual problems and previous knowledge, (2) extend their knowledge by new instruments, constructs and scientific framing and (3) consider the value of academic knowledge for their particular contexts and professional practices. In contrast to the commonly held assumption that the ambiguity of academic knowledge increases the chances of being practically relevant, this study further shows that the ambiguity of academic knowledge can also decrease the chances that practitioners consider it as relevant if it provides multiple courses of action, which overwhelm practitioners with choosing the course of action that is most meaningful to them.

Keywords

Practical relevance, practitioners' perspective, forms of relevance, ambiguity

4.1 Introduction

Understanding how management research can achieve practical relevance is of central concern to management as an applied science. To date, the literature on practical relevance has focused mainly on how practical relevance can be achieved from a scholarly point of view, neglecting the essential view of practitioners on what constitutes relevant knowledge. Studies that acknowledge the constitutive role of the adopting system to consider academic knowledge as relevant have discussed the forms of relevance that management research can provide (Pelz, 1978; Nicolai & Seidl, 2010), the adoption and adaptation of academic knowledge (Rasche & Behnam, 2009; Seidl, 2007; Nicolai & Dautwitz, 2010), and the role of the ambiguity of academic knowledge in increasing practical relevance (Astley & Zammuto, 1992; Benders & Bijsterfeld, 2000). However, the particular ways in which *practitioners* consider academic knowledge as relevant has not been systematically examined. In particular, we do not know in what particular kinds of academic knowledge practitioners consider as relevant before they apply it to their organizational contexts and under what conditions they consider ambiguous academic knowledge as relevant. This perceived gap is particularly striking because these studies stress that "the particular ways in which research output affects management practice and the particular way in which it is understood are ultimately determined by the system of practice itself" (Kieser, Nicolai, & Seidl, 2015: 206). To address this gap, this study approaches the following research question: Under what conditions do practitioners consider academic knowledge as relevant?

To answer this question, this paper examines the practitioners' perspective on relevance by drawing on their accounts of the relevance of academic concepts based on data from fifty-three semi-structured interviews. Applying a qualitative method to examine practitioners' individual interpretations and perceptions (Patton, 2005; Maitlis, 2005), a theoretical model of practitioners' relevance construction is developed, which shows that practitioners consider academic knowledge as relevant if they (1) match academic knowledge against their contextual problems and previous knowledge, (2) extend their knowledge by new instruments, constructs and scientific framing and (3) consider the value of academic knowledge for their organizational practices and contexts. This model offers two contributions to our understanding of practical relevance. First, understanding relevance from the practitioners' perspective, it is shown that even if practitioners consider academic knowledge as novel knowledge, they consider it as relevant only if they do consider academic knowledge as valuable for their organizational contexts and professional practices. Thus, this

study suggests that academic knowledge must allow practitioners to extend their knowledge and to consider its value in order to "lead to the change, modification, or confirmation of how managers think, talk and act" (Kieser, Nicolai, & Seidl, 2015: 144). As the compatibility of academic knowledge with practitioners' context and knowledge is a necessary precondition for practitioners' relevance construction, this condition tends to contribute to the reproduction of organizational structures and an organization's inability to innovate. Second, drawing on the practitioners' perspective on relevance reveals that there are two sides to ambiguity. In line with previous studies (Astely & Zammuto, 1992; Nicolai & Dautwitz, 2010), it is shown that the ambiguity of academic knowledge increases the likelihood that practitioners consider it as relevant because ambiguous academic knowledge facilitates the compatibility to a range of contexts and practices. However, ambiguous academic knowledge also decreases the likelihood that practitioners consider it as relevant if it provides multiple meaningful courses of action, which overwhelms practitioners with choosing the course of action that is most meaningful to them.

The remainder of this paper is structured in five sections. The first section offers a review of the literature on the role of practice in constructing practical relevance. The second section explains the methodology for collecting and analysing the data. The third section presents the empirical results in five parts: (1) matching academic knowledge against practitioners' contexts and knowledge, (2) the dimensions of ambiguity facilitating matching academic knowledge against practitioners' context and knowledge, (3) extending practitioners' knowledge by instruments, constructs and scientific framing, (4) practitioners' construction of the kinds of value, and (5) failures in the construction of relevance. The paper concludes with a discussion of the findings and opportunities for future research based on a reflection on the limitations of this paper.

4.2 Theoretical background

As management research has put particular emphasis on its status as an applied science, a huge body of literature has proliferated that gives rise to a variety of conceptualizations on how relevance is achieved. A large part of the relevance literature relies on a rather simple conceptualization of how relevance is achieved by assuming that knowledge becomes relevant if it is adequately produced (Gibbons et al., 1994; Greenwood, Suddaby, & Hinings, 2002; Reason, 2006; Rousseau, 2012; Van de Ven & Johnson, 2006) and disseminated (Bansal, et

al., 2012; Gopinath & Hoffman, 1995; Oviatt & Miller, 1989; Starkey & Madan, 2001). Thus, most studies within the relevance literature "rely (implicitly or explicitly) on models based on the problematic notion of a simple and linear transfer of knowledge, [even though] these models cannot capture adequately the complexities of the utilization process" (Kieser, Nicolai, & Seidl, 2015: 72). However, few studies consider the complexities of how practical relevance is achieved by acknowledging the constitutive role of the adopting system in the construction of relevance. Although these studies draw on different sociological traditions, such as those of Luhmann, Wittgenstein or Bourdieu, they share three common ideas that challenge the fundamental assumptions of the linear model of knowledge transfer. First, in contrast to the assumption that academic knowledge is relevant if it can be directly and instrumentally used, some scholars show that academic knowledge provides various forms of relevance (Nicolai & Seidl, 2010; Pelz, 1978). Second, in contrast to the common assumption that management science can a priori define what is relevant, these studies stress that practical relevance can never be fully judged by the scientific domain as it necessarily needs to be adapted to the context of practice to prove it is practically relevant (Nicolai & Dautwiz, 2010; Rasche & Behnam, 2009). Third, contrary to the assumption that knowledge is relevant if it addresses concrete practical problems, scholars state that the ambiguity of concepts increases the likelihood of relevance (Astley & Zammuto, 1992; Benders & van Bijsterveld, 2000). On the basis of these common ideas, three main topics can be discerned: the forms of relevance that management research can provide, the adoption and adaptation of academic knowledge and the role of ambiguity in creating relevance.

4.2.1 Forms of relevance

First, some scholars expand the view that academic knowledge is relevant only if it used instrumentally, i.e., if it directly influences managerial actions. They maintain that in addition to demonstrating instrumental relevance, academic knowledge can be conceptually and symbolically relevant (Knorr-Cetina, 1977; Nicolai & Seidl, 2010; Pelz, 1978). They speak of conceptual relevance if scientific research modifies how practitioners perceive or conceptualize their problems and of symbolic relevance when research is used to legitimate a course of action to oneself or to others (Astley & Zammuto, 1992; Beyer & Trice, 1982). This classification has been further refined by Nicolai and Seidl (2010), who argue that research is of instrumental relevance if it takes the form of schemes that provide systematics for ordering, recipes to choose an action or forecasts. Generally, knowledge that is instrumentally relevant helps in the selection of a particular course of action. In addition, academic knowledge is

conceptually relevant if research provides linguistic constructs, contingencies that uncover new actions, or causal relations of which managers are usually unaware. Knowledge that is conceptually relevant changes the understanding of particular situations. Finally, academic knowledge can be symbolically relevant if it provides means of legitimation or rhetoric devices that provide symbolic language. Academic knowledge is symbolically relevant if it legitimizes a chosen course of action. Moreover, it has been argued that management research is more likely to be of conceptual and symbolic use rather than of instrumental use because of the contextual nature of management knowledge (e.g. Beyer, 1997; Rynes, Bartunek, & Daft, 2001).

These studies on the forms of relevance acknowledge that academic knowledge might be relevant to practice in different ways, which extends the common belief that relevance is identical to an instrumental use of academic knowledge (Bartunek & Rynes, 2014). However, the various forms of relevance have been examined only in the context of management science. Discussing what form of relevance can be expected from management science does not clarify in what way practitioners themselves consider academic knowledge as relevant. It is thus unclear whether practitioners conceive that academic knowledge helps them select a particular course of action, change their understanding or legitimize their actions. Thus, more research is needed that empirically examines the ways in which practitioners consider academic knowledge as relevant.

4.2.2 Adaptation and adoption of academic knowledge

Second, another group of studies examines the ways in which academic knowledge is adapted and adopted to management practice (Beyer & Trice, 1982). Their conceptualization of (academic and other) knowledge is based on the premise that "knowledge is only defined by the particular context into which it is embedded (Brown & Duguid, 1991), which means that knowledge cannot be considered independently of its context" (Kieser, Nicolai, & Seidl, 2015: 73; Bartunek & Reynes, 2014; Corley & Gioia, 2011). This implies that academic knowledge cannot be directly applied to management practice but must be adjusted to the adopting system in order to be practically relevant (Astley & Zammuto, 1992; Kieser & Leiner, 2009; Seidl, 2009). However, because academic knowledge will be adapted to management practice, it will become knowledge that is no longer regarded as purely academic knowledge (Kieser & Leiner, 2009; Rasche & Behnam, 2009; Seidl, 2007). From this perspective, the lack of a direct knowledge transfer between management science and practice

is not a problem that can be resolved. However, this is not to say that these scholars completely dismiss the possibility that academic knowledge has an effect on management practice. They maintain that academic knowledge can produce "productive misunderstandings" (Seidl, 2007) or "fictions" (Rasche & Behnam, 2009). Productive misunderstanding refers to the phenomenon that practice cannot but reconstruct the meaning of academic knowledge in its own terms and context and "at the same time […] make use of the meaning material [...] as an external provocation to create internally something new" (Teubner, 2000: 48, cited in Seidl, 2007). Similarly, fictions refer to the need to adapt the academic knowledge to the domain of practice. By contrast, fictions also indicate that practitioners act as if academic knowledge were relevant prior to the actual application. Academic knowledge is "usually formulated at such a high level of generality that in the moment of application the relevance of research is still a fiction: Managers do not and cannot know yet whether knowledge is relevant; however, they can act as if the offered knowledge were relevant" (Rasche & Behnam, 2009: 249). Both productive misunderstandings and fictions are irritations to practice from which further "sensemaking processes can unfold" (Rasche & Behnam, 2009: 250). In other words, these irritations are modified, supplemented or even neglected according to a particular context. The resulting actions are not the outcome of a linear transfer between management science and practice or particularly relevant knowledge claims, but rather "the product of an internal organizational reconstruction of knowledge" (Rasche & Behnam, 2009: 50) according to the particular practical context.

In this sense, scholars have shown that the meaning of the research content changes when it is adopted by management practice in order to become meaningful to a particular context (Jarzabkowski & Wilson, 2006; Seidl, 2007; 2009; Nicolai & Dautwitz, 2010). Yet, the type of meaning created from academic knowledge is not completely random. Rather, the context into which research results become embedded thereby "restricts the range of possible meanings that it may attach to them" (Seidl, 2007: 207). In this sense, scholars indicate that academic knowledge is relevant only if it resonates with the context to which it is adapted (Seidl, 2007), organizational members' assumptions (Corburn, 2005) or their lived experience and interests (Nicolai & Dautwitz, 2010). Generally, scholars examining the adaptation of academic knowledge show that relevance cannot be determined a priori by management science; but, the particular way in which academic knowledge is relevant to practice and understood by practitioners is an active process that is determined by the domain of practice itself (Kieser, Nicolai, & Seidl, 2015).

Studies on the adoption and adaptation of academic knowledge emphasize that academic knowledge needs to be adapted to a specific context in order to be practically relevant. By stating that the particular way in which academic knowledge is practically relevant is determined by the adopting context itself, these studies implicitly assume that academic knowledge is relevant only when it is already adopted or applied to a particular organization. However, because practice has to "treat the knowledge as hypothetically relevant prior to the actual application" (Rasche & Behnam, 2009: 249) based on misunderstanding and fictions, it remains unclear how practitioners construct the relevance of academic knowledge before they apply it to their respective contexts. Additionally, these studies do not examine in what way academic knowledge resonates with practitioners' contexts or experiences and interests. Academic knowledge might resonate very differently, given that managers from diverse contexts draw on their individual experiences and knowledge. In this sense, we know very little about the ways in which practitioners consider academic knowledge that resonates with their individual contexts and experiences as practically relevant. Investigating this perceived gap would also allow for paying more attention to the "dynamics between academic and practical or experiential knowledge" (Kieser, Nicolai, & Seidl, 2015: 71) and the different forms of relevance that these dynamics entail.

4.2.3 The role of ambiguity in the construction of relevance

A third group of studies investigates the role of the ambiguity of academic knowledge to achieve practical relevance. Scholars examining the role of ambiguity either refer to linguistic ambiguity, i.e., the interpretive flexibility of academic concepts as such (Astley & Zammuto, 1992; Benders & van Veen, 2001; Rasche & Behnam, 2009) or to contextual ambiguity, i.e. the plurality of a concept's uses (Nicolai & Dautwitz, 2010). Context ambiguity can facilitate practical relevance because it allows for "a large variety of practices" (Nicolai & Dautwitz, 2010: 886) that originates from the plurality of contexts in which a concept is used. By contrast, academic concepts that are linguistically ambiguous are more likely to be practically relevant because their "openness of meaning" (Powell, Lovallo, & Caringal, 2006: 175) or "interpretive viability" (Benders & Bijsterfeld, 2000: 50), leave room for interpretation in ways that are relevant to the interests of disparate groups of people (Astley &Zammuto, 1992). In this sense, linguistically ambiguous scientific concepts speak "to different audiences, allowing each subgroup to interpret the theory in congenial, if mutually incompatible, ways" (Davis, 1986: 296), such that "multiple audiences can each construct a

meaning of the concept that is beneficial to their interests" (Benders & van Veen, 2001: 38). In contrast to scholars who argue that academic knowledge is irrelevant to practice because research findings are vaguely worded (MacLean, MacIntosh, & Grant, 2002; Sandelands & Drazin, 1989) and do not address concrete practical problems or provide context-specific knowledge (Hambrick, 1994; Van de Ven & Johnson, 2006; Huff & Huff, 2001; Hinings & Greenwood, 2002), these studies hold that linguistically ambiguous academic knowledge is more likely to be practically relevant (Nicolai & Dautwitz, 2010). Although linguistic ambiguity “entails a loss of directly descriptive information and fails to capture the richness and complexity of phenomena encountered by practitioners in organizational settings […] it enhances its capacity to convey meaningful connotations […]. The reduction of theoretical language to highly specific, empirically descriptive terminology would destroy this source of meaning" (Astley & Zammuto, 1992: 445).

Generally, studies examining the role of ambiguity in achieving relevance argue that in order “to be made to ‘fit’ the concrete organizational context” (Seidl, 2007: 208), academic concepts need to be open to many different contexts and many ways of using it in order to be practically relevant. Thereby, these studies assume that "insightful practitioners (…) understand the necessary ambiguity of scientific knowledge as an opportunity to contextualize this knowledge according to their specific circumstances" (Rasche & Behnam, 2009: 252; Ortmann & Salzman, 2002). However, these studies do not discuss under what conditions practitioners consider ambiguous academic knowledge as an opportunity to contextualize this knowledge. In this sense, it remains unclear in which ways practitioners construct the linguistic and context ambiguity of academic concepts as an opportunity to contextualize this knowledge and whether this increases the likelihood that practitioners consider academic knowledge as practically relevant.

Overall, by examining how practical relevance can be achieved, these studies acknowledge the constitutive role of management practice in constructing the practical relevance of academic knowledge in light of practitioners’ particular contexts. Practical relevance is thus conceptualized as an active construction process by the knowledge "consumers" who make knowledge relevant according to their own contexts and existing knowledge. However, the particular ways in which practitioners consider academic knowledge as relevant has not been systematically examined. This lack of knowledge creates two main problems: we cannot claim to know how practical relevance is achieved unless we examine (1) in what ways practitioners construct the forms of academic knowledge that management research provides

as relevant, and (2) under what conditions practitioners construct ambiguous knowledge as relevant. To respond to these perceived gaps, we need to empirically examine the ways in which practitioners consider academic knowledge as relevant prior to application. Thus, this paper addresses the following research question: Under what conditions do practitioners consider academic knowledge as practically relevant?

4.3 Methodology

4.3.1 Research context

To examine under what conditions practitioners consider academic knowledge as relevant this study draws on the context of executive management education because it is often claimed that "the most obvious way that faculty research impacts practice is through education" (AACSB International, Impact of Research Task Force, 2007: 37). Additionally, there are three more reasons for the choice of this particular context. First, executive courses are typically directed towards equipping practitioners with academic knowledge that should enable them to better identify and evaluate appropriate interventions in response to managerial challenges (Burke & Rau, 2010; Vaara & Faÿ, 2012). In this sense, the context of executive management education is particularly suitable to examine the conditions under which practitioners consider academic knowledge as relevant before it is applied to management practice. Second, compared to "ordinary" MBA courses, executive MBA (EMBA) courses differ in the audience they target as they are primarily aimed at executives with several years of professional or managerial experience (Conger & Xin, 2000; Vaara & Faÿ, 2012). Courses at the EMBA level thus provide an appropriate setting for studying the relevance of academic knowledge as practitioners' professional experience allows them to judge whether scientific content might be of relevance to their professional contexts. Third, and in relation to the second point, executive teaching is typically conceptualized as a setting in which practitioners come to make a connection between management research and their own managerial experiences (Anderson, 2002; Conger & Xin, 2000; Tushman, et al., 2007). This context is thus suitable to study under what conditions practitioners make sense of academic knowledge in light of their experiences and whether academic knowledge resonates with these experiences.

4.3.2 Data collection

This study draws on a sample of 121 EMBA students in four different executive programmes. The sampling of the programmes is based on four criteria. First, I selected those programmes that obtained at least three accreditations among the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), European Quality Improvement System (EQUIS), Association of MBAs (AMBA), Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), and Foundation for International Business Administration Accreditation (FIBAA), in order to ensure the integration of "high-quality" research in these programmes (Adler & Harzing, 2009). Second, I chose those courses that relate to the topic of strategy as they are typically seen as the “capstone” courses of management that integrate various different management disciplines (Baldridge, Floyd, & Markóczy, 2004; Bower, 2008; Grant, 2008). I assumed that the selection of courses on the same topic would allow me to compare practitioners' perceptions of similar concepts. Third, I selected those four courses that met the criteria of heterogeneous sampling (Yin, 2013; Patton, 1990). As indicated in Table 1, all courses draw on different teaching methods, i.e., the academic concepts were either illustrated in lectures, in case studies, group presentations, or real-life cases.

Table 2: Overview of Executive Courses

Course	Accredi-tations	Requirements	Duration	Status in curriculum	Teaching Method	Number of participants	Class diversity
1	EQUIS AACSB FIBA	- Bachelor degree - 5 years managerial experience - 3 years leadership experience	10 days (à 10h)	Compulsary	- Focus on case studies - in addition lecturing, guest speakers	48	Øage: 39 Ømanagerial experience: 13 years Øleadership experience: 5 years
2	EQUIS AACSB QAA	- University degree - 6 years managerial experience	3 days (à 8h)	Elective	- Focus on group presentations - in addition lecturing	28	Øage: 34 Ømanagerial experience: 8 years Øleadership experience: 2 years
3	EQUIS AMBA AACSB	- University degree - 4 years managerial experience - if no university degree: 7-10 years managerial experience	3 days (à 9h)	Compulsary	- Focus on real-life cases - in addition lecturing	14	Øage: 36 Ømanagerial experience: 8 years Øleadership experience: 3 years
4	EDEXCEL UKBA QAA BAC	- Undergraduate degree or equivalent professional qualification - 5 years managerial experience	10 days (à 4h)	Elective	- Focus on lectures -in addition case studies	31	Øage: 36 Ømanagerial experience: 9 years Øleadership experience: 3 years

The heterogeneity of these teaching methods counteracts the potential influence of the teaching method on practitioners' construction of relevance (Eisenhardt, 1991). It is thus possible to meaningfully compare practitioners' construction of relevance across the courses. Although all courses are different with regard to their teaching methods, they all draw on a theory-based teaching rationale, i.e., their orientation towards teaching academic concepts. This rationale is illustrated in the respective reading material, course announcements in the EMBA brochures, the courses' syllabi and the assessment and selection process of students. As indicated in Table 2, I selected students of an EMBA cohort according to the diversity of their former education, professional experience (at least five years or more), current position (lower and middle managers as well as members of the TMT and CEOs) and the type of organization with which they were affiliated, ranging from for-profit to non-profit and from large global firms to small regional firms. This sample allows the generalization of the findings to a wide variety of professional contexts as practitioners draw on diverse frames of references to construct academic knowledge as practically relevant.

Table 3: Overview of Practitioners

Criteria	Subcriteria	Number of practitioners
Age group*	20-30	13/53
	31-40	20/53
	41-	15/53
Education*	Natural sciences	18/53
	Social sciences	25/53
	Apprenticeship	07/53
Professional experience (years)	5-10	22/53
	11-15	17/53
	16-	14/53
Current position	Lower managers	15/53
	Middle managers	26/53
	TMT/CEO	12/53
Type of Organization	For profit (regional, national and international)	41/53
	Non-profit (regional, national and international)	12/53
Nationality	Europe	41/53
	North America	13/53
	Africa	4/53
	Asia	3/53
	Australia	2/53

* Note that some practitioners did not provide information on their age or education

The design of this study was built on a qualitative method (Patton, 2005; Langley & Abdallah, 2011). A qualitative method is well suited to the study of social constructions, such

as the constructions of relevance, especially when they refer to individuals' interpretations and perceptions (Silverman, 2006; Maitlis, 2005). The advantage of a qualitative method is that informants act and talk in a natural way that is meaningful and culturally salient, which allows for rich and explanatory data (Langley, 1999; Huberman & Miles, 2002).

Table 4: Overview of collected data

	Main Data Source	Secondary Data		
	Number of Interviews with practitioners	**Number of Document Pages**	**Hours of Observation**	**Number of Pictures and Videos**
Course 1	17	600	100	20
Course 2	11	500	30	12
Course 3	13	600	30	35
Course 4	12	300	30	17
Total	**53**	**2000**	**190**	**84**

As indicated in Table 3, the main sources of data are fifty-three semi-structured interviews that typically lasted between a half hour and an hour. For these interviews, a semi-structured interview schedule was used, comprising a consistent set of prompts (i.e., practitioners' positions and relation to strategy, learnings, motivations and perceptions of the content) to which practitioners could respond in detail (Gioia & Thomas, 1996). Although interviewees do normally not directly account for their constructions in terms of questions and answers, they share stories that touch on their interpretations of academic concepts (Langley et al., 2013; Rouleau, 2005; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). The conducted interviews thus highlight stories about how the academic content is constructed as relevant in light of their current or past experiences: events, activities and professional circumstances related to the contextualization of academic knowledge. In the study of actors' social construction, it is moreover expedient to use secondary data to counteract the bias potentially resulting from

relying on practitioners' construction of relevance of the academic content during the interviews (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Eisenhardt, 1989) and to gather the breadth of information needed to develop a relatively holistic picture of the relevance construction (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). Thus, I probed the main data with secondary data including recorded field notes of one-hundred ninety hours of non-participant observation of practitioners' reactions and interactions in the course, slides, articles, (text)books, evaluations of the courses and participants' notes and summaries (see Table 1 for an overview of all collected data).

4.3.3 Data analysis

An iterative approach was used to analyse the data, circulating back and forth between the empirical material and the literature (Huberman & Miles, 1994). This approach proceeded in three main stages. First, for each course, all interviews were coded using a qualitative content analysis on practitioners' construction of relevance (Maitlis, 2005; Langley & Abdallah, 2011). Those constructions were identified when practitioners gave accounts of their opinions and understandings of a single academic concept, i.e., when they uttered that the concept would lead to a change, modification or confirmation of how they think, talk and act (Kieser, Nicolai, & Seidl, 2015; Nicolai & Seidl, 2010). Given the interest in the practical relevance of academic knowledge, I focused on those accounts explicitly referring to scientific concepts that have (at least rudimentary) roots in the scientific discourse (Nicolai & Dautwitz, 2010), such as the core competence concept (Prahalad & Hamel, 1990), competitive advantage (Barney, 1991), organizational design (Donaldson, 2001), strategic issue management (Ansoff, 1980), incentive systems (Bebchuk & Fried, 2006), non-market strategy (Baron, 1995), creative destruction (Schumpeter, 1950) and weak ties (Granovetter, 1973). In addition, I informed the analysis from other angles and levels, such as the field notes of my observations, practitioners' notes and summaries, slides and readings. The aim of this first-order phase of analysis was to identify the academic concepts that were considered as (ir-)relevant and key categories that practitioners mentioned in relation to the practical relevance of academic concepts for each site.

Second, and based on this analysis, I compared the categories across practitioners in different courses (Huberman & Miles, 2002) and subsumed and aggregated similar categories that were independent of the particular teaching method. This step of the analysis allowed me to identify why and how practitioners construct particular concepts as relevant, based on three

main categories. The first category refers to the constructions of the professional context and individual knowledge. Thus, within this first category, I differentiated between contextual knowledge that I refer to as a "contextual need" or "contextual problem" and individual knowledge that I refer to as "experience" or "intuition". Whereas a contextual need and a contextual problem are always related to the particularities of practitioners' construction of their current contexts (e.g., the type of industry, type and size of organization, or context-specific values and expected behaviour, the difficulties with these contexts, such as disruptive technologies, unproductive strategy meetings or a lack of identification with the corporate strategy), experience refers to either previously accumulated knowledge (e.g., through education or former positions) or knowledge accumulated during their current professional occupations (March, 2006; Hill & Houghton, 2001). Accounts were coded as referring to intuition when practitioners expressed hunches of directions or solutions based on "life-learned rules and exceptions, dispositions and tendencies, balances and checks" (Minsky, 1988: 22; Polanyi & Prosch, 1977).

The second category refers to the types of knowledge that practitioners attributed to academic concepts. Taking Nicolai and Seidl's (2010) differentiation of forms of relevance as a device to group the types of knowledge, I differentiated between "instruments", "constructs" and "scientific framing". Academic concepts were coded as instruments if practitioners considered them as systematics of ordering, checklists, procedures or tools, I coded them as constructs if they were considered as new conceptualizations of situations or causal relations and as scientific framing if the concepts were considered as providing a scientific language for practitioners' thoughts, arguments and actions. The third category refers to the value, i.e., the forms of relevance, that, according to practitioners' consideration of different types of knowledge will or might entail. I identified three types of value that I termed "improvement", "innovation" and "legitimation". Practitioners' accounts were coded as improvement if they considered the instruments, constructs or scientific framing as an enhancement of their professional practices (e.g., the structure, communication or problem-solving capabilities) or of their understanding of a situation or problem. The accounts were coded as innovation if practitioners gave accounts that the academic concepts provided new courses of action, new ways of thinking or new understandings of previous perceptions. Legitimation refers to the confirmation of chosen and future actions and the appropriation of credibility of arguments or actions towards others.

To check for inter-coder reliability and any inconsistencies in interpreting the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Tinsley & Weiss, 2000), the identified categories were then presented to

two colleagues who were familiar with qualitative methods but who had no attachment to this study. Thus, I provided each independent coder with definitions of the categories and requested that they sort a selection of quotes from all sites to the categories. Then, I calculated the average agreement level of each coder with the overall coding scheme; the agreement level was 85.0 per cent, indicating a high level of agreement (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013). Disagreements in coding served as the basis for discussions about how to strengthen the categories and thus improve the trustworthiness of the interpretations until a decision was reached about how to solve each discrepancy.

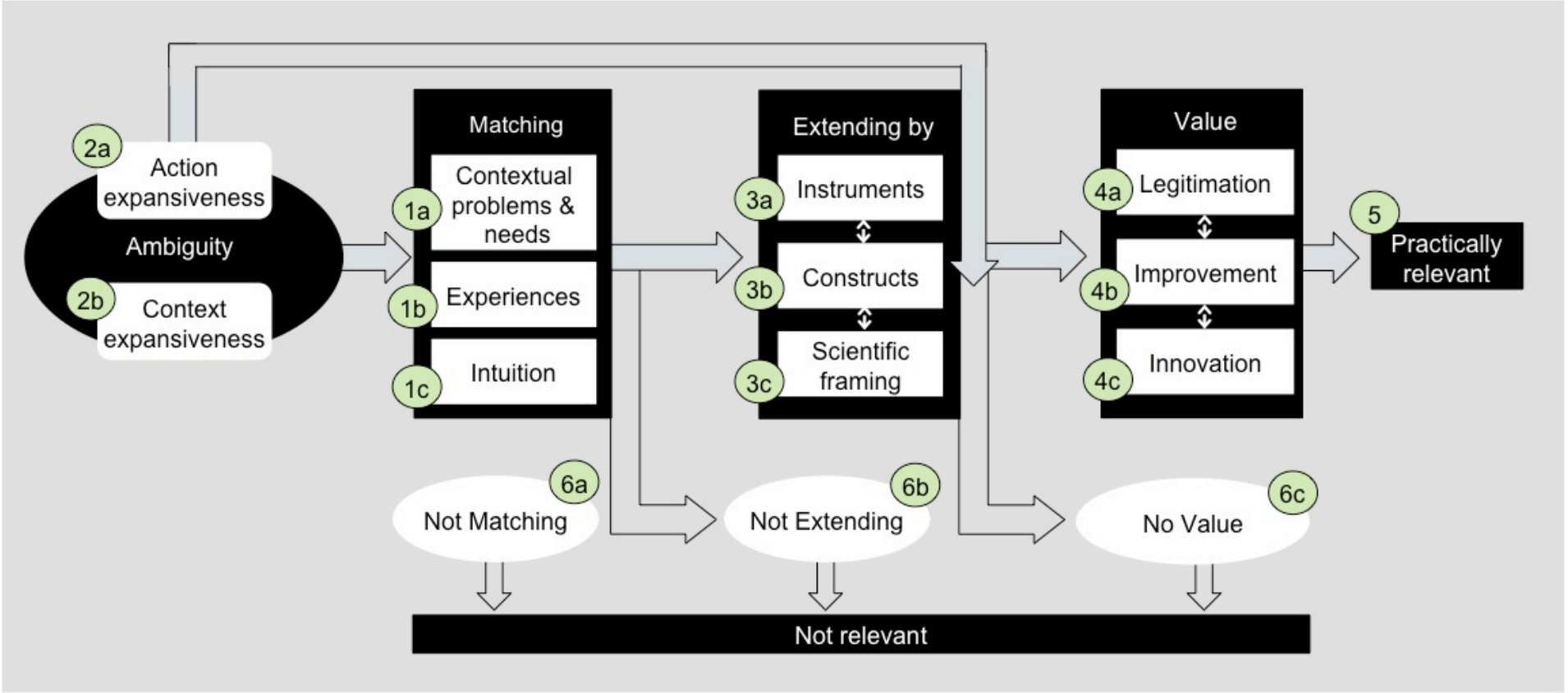
In a third step, I traced the interplay between the contextual and individual factors, the types of knowledge and the types of value. For this, I developed a diagram to see how the conditions and types of value are linked. This analysis revealed two main conditions under which practitioners consider academic knowledge as relevant that I refer to as "matching" and "extending". This rearrangement of categories revealed two dimensions of ambiguity that facilitate matching, that is, "context expansiveness" and "action expansiveness". In a final stage, I integrated the negative accounts of practitioners' relevance construction to counter-check the validity of the identified conditions. This final stage of the analysis revealed three conditions that prevent practitioners from considering academic concepts as relevant, which I refer to as “not matching”, "not extending" and "no value".

4.4 Findings

In order to make it easier to follow the description of the findings, I provide the theoretical model of practitioners’ relevance construction (Figure 1) upfront. It gives an overview of the key concepts, abstracting from practitioners’ individual accounts of relevance. Starting with number one, Figure 1 depicts that practitioners consider academic knowledge as relevant if they, first, match academic knowledge against their contextual problems and needs (1a), experiences (1b) or intuitions (1c). Academic knowledge that is considered as ambiguous, i.e., that is action expansive (2a) and context expansive (2b), facilitates that practitioners match it against their contextual problems and needs, experiences or intuitions. If practitioners match academic knowledge against their contexts and knowledge, they can, second, extend their experiences or intuitions by instruments (3a), constructs (3b) and scientific framing (3c). If practitioners extend their knowledge by instruments, constructs and/or scientific framing, they might consider academic knowledge as value, in the form of a legitimation (4a), an

improvement (4b) and/or an innovation (4c). Only if they consider academic knowledge as valuable, practitioners construct academic knowledge as practically relevant (5).

Figure 1: Theoretical model of practitioners' relevance construction



These are the basic conditions of practitioners' relevance construction. However, practitioners might also consider academic knowledge as irrelevant, thereby giving rise to three conditions of the failure of the construction of relevance. Practitioners do not consider academic knowledge as relevant if they are not able to match academic knowledge against their contextual problems and needs or their experiences or intuitions (6a). Additionally, academic knowledge is not considered relevant if it does not allow practitioners to extend their experiences or intuitions (6b). Lastly, practitioners may not consider academic knowledge as relevant if they match it against their contexts and knowledge and extend their knowledge but do not consider academic knowledge as valuable for their thinking and acting (6c).

In this section, the findings will unfold in five parts: (1) practitioners matching academic knowledge against their contextual problems, experiences or intuitions, (2) the dimensions of ambiguity facilitating matching, (3) practitioners extending their knowledge by instruments, constructs and scientific framing, (4) practitioners' construction of the kinds of value that academic knowledge provides and (5) the failures in the construction of relevance. To simplify the presentation of the findings, I illustrate the points with examples of practitioners' accounts. Appendices 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 provide additional examples of all findings.

4.4.1 Matching academic knowledge against practitioners' contexts and knowledge

The analysis revealed that practitioners consider academic knowledge as relevant if they match academic knowledge against their contexts, experiences or intuition. In this sense, three variations of the this condition were identified: (1a) matching against contextual problems and needs, (1b) matching against experiences and (1c) matching against intuition.

The first variation refers to matching academic concepts against contextual problems and needs. Contextual problems and needs can either refer to current or to future issues that practitioners will face. A representative example of matching against contextual needs is provided in the following quote describing that a practitioner matches Bebchuk and Fried's (2006) scientific concept of incentive systems against his need to be sensitized to potential problems caused by the launch of a new incentive system. The practitioner, the head of department of a manufacturer states:

> *Specifically the concept of incentive systems was interesting for me [because] you get a kind of sensitivity again for the problem analysis because if you're in the daily business you sometimes lose that. For example in our firm we are launching an entirely new benefit*

scheme and then it will be helpful to be sensitized to problems and to know what problems could come up during this launch.

In this example, the practitioner matches the concept of incentive systems developed by Bebchuck and Fried (2006) against the need to be aware of difficulties that might come up during the change of an organization's incentive system. Because the concept explains how different incentive systems can change the organization, the practitioner is sensitized to potential problems in relation to the planned implementation of the new incentive system.

In addition to matching against contextual needs, practitioners can also match academic knowledge against their contextual problems. The following illustration of matching against contextual problems refers to Porter's concept of competitive strategy (Porter, 1997), which is scientifically rooted in resource-based theory (Barney, 2001) and relates to Ansoff's terms of the "outside-in" and "inside-out view" of strategy (Ansoff, 1965). A marketing account manager of an insurance company describes the problem in her company as follows:

(...) in my firm, we are too concerned about us instead of being concerned about the costumer. (...) inside-out is ok, but we also have to think about the environment. Thus outside-in would be a necessary switch for us because new technologies change the behaviour of the consumer and this perspective (...) has not yet penetrated our work. It would change our products and services and still won't rest on the thinking that we just differentiate through the quality of our services.

This example shows that the practitioner matches the concept of competitive strategy (Porter, 1997) against her organization's problem of being focused on the inside-out view of strategy (particularly the problem of the differentiation through the quality of insurance services), which might lead to losing market shares because costumers might obtain insurance products from other companies that develop new technologies.

In addition to matching against contextual needs and problems, practitioners can also match academic concepts against their experiences and intuition. Although contextual needs and problems also partly refer to practitioners' experiences, matching against experiences relates to practitioners' generalized experiences that are abstracted from their particular, current occupation. The following quote refers to the scientific concept of means-ends introduced by Herbert Simon (1978), which a marketing manager of a logistics company matches against his experiences of developing a strategy:

The point is that you realize that every strategic issue that you add will have a follow-up element. That is cause-and-effect. Often in strategy you think about an issue but then you stop and you don't think about the next steps. So having this awareness that if you give a

recommendation you should know what to get at and where it leads to. It provides relational and consequential thinking (...).

In this example, the practitioner matches the concept of means-ends (Simon, 1978) against his general experience with developing strategy. In particular, he matches his experience with developing strategic issues against the rationale of cause and effect or substantive rationality.

Additionally, matching can also refer to practitioners matching academic concepts against their intuition. In this case, practitioners match academic concepts against hunches on directions, solutions or relationships. The following quote relates to Geroski's (2003) scientific concept of emerging markets, which a patent attorney matches against her intuitive way of analysing nascent markets:

(...) the concept provided a methodological way of analyzing the market and where we stand with innovation.(…). It probably would have been the way I analysed it had I not known this concept. (...) for instance when you are examining a market, let's say a nascent market (…) I would have analysed the technology, I would have analysed the market and then analysed the organization. (However, if I had not known the concept) I might have just jumbled all those ideas into one unorganized thought.

This example shows that although the practitioner considers the concept of emerging markets (Geroski, 2003) as systematics with which to analyze such a market, she matches the dimensions of these systematics (i.e., technology, market and organization) against her intuitive way of having analysed an emerging market. Generally, this condition shows that practitioners construct academic knowledge as relevant if it is compatible with their specific contextual problems and needs, general experiences or intuition. Thus, matching against practitioners' context and knowledge is a precondition for practitioners relevance construction

4.4.2 Dimensions of ambiguity facilitating matching

In line with previous studies, the analysis revealed that the ambiguity of academic concepts facilitates the matching of academic concepts against practitioners' contexts and knowledge . Academic concepts are ambiguous if they allow for multiple interpretations and provide equivocal definitions (Astley & Zammuto, 1992; Benders & van Veen, 2001). Ambiguity facilitates the matching of academic concepts against practitioners' contextual needs, experiences and intuitions by allowing practitioners to make sense of the concepts in light of their particular contextual and experiential interests. Practitioners are usually unaware of the

facilitating role of equivocal academic knowledge. However, one strategic marketing manager of a logistics company is aware of the role of ambiguity:

> *(...) The meaning of the theory does not play such a huge role because it is necessary to bring everything in the right form for your own business and to differentiate application possibilities. (...) The theoretical concepts, like what is a goal, what is a competence, are a basis but it's up to you to apply it.*

This quote illustrates that the "interpretive viability" (Benders & Bijsterfeld, 2000: 50) of ambiguous academic concepts leaves scope for practitioners' interpretations regarding how and in which contexts these concepts can be used. In this sense, two dimensions of ambiguity have been identified that particularly facilitate the matching of academic concepts against practitioners' needs, problems, experiences and intuitions: (2a) the action expansiveness and, (2b) the context expansiveness of academic concepts.

First, in order to facilitate matching, academic knowledge has to be open to a broad range of actions, i.e. it needs to be action expansive. The chief physician of a hospital department indicates that the concept of issues management (Ansoff, 1980) allows for multiple approaches and courses of action, which are based on the concept's generalized procedure to develop strategy:

> *There are multiple ways to structure a strategic process and there are multiple branch-specific approaches and not everything is coloured with the same brush. I appreciate that there is no sure formula.*

Second, context expansiveness refers to the condition that academic concepts are open to a broad range of contexts in order to facilitate the matching of academic concepts against practitioners' contexts and knowledge. In contrast to context ambiguity (Nicolai & Dautwitz, 2010), which refers to a variety of ways in which a concept can be used, context expansiveness refers to the plurality of contexts in which academic concepts can be interpreted. In this sense, academic concepts provide general mechanisms that are compatible with and applicable to many different contexts. A federal government consultant describes this as follows:

> *The transfer or the application depends on you. Not every concept is equally relevant. (...) And some concepts are helpful whether it's a small, medium-sized or a huge company or a government because the conceptual thinking is so rudimentary, like positioning, initiation and value creation. (...) In addition, these concepts relate to basic problems that are the same in all industries like, [e.g.,] strategy formulation and communication, top-down or bottom-up, that's independent from industry and company specifics.*

This quote illustrates that if practitioners consider academic concepts as providing general mechanisms such as how to position a company in the market (Ansoff, 1980; Porter, 1997) or how to create value (Barney, 1991), they can relate the academic concepts to their diverse contexts because the academic concepts are compatible to basic problems and elementary conceptual strategic thinking. By contrast, academic concepts that are considered as providing mechanisms for particular contexts do not facilitate matching. This can be shown in the next quote, in which a managing director of a public broadcaster clearly indicates that the concept of foreign direct investments (Froot, 2008) is not compatible with his organizational context:

> *(…) you can imagine that the concept of foreign direct investments in a media house governed by public law is not really applicable, right?*

Overall, ambiguous academic knowledge facilitates the matching of academic concepts against practitioners' contexts and knowledge as it allows practitioners to make sense of it despite their concrete contexts and experiences. In this sense, it is more likely that practitioners match academic concepts against their contextual needs, problems, experiences and intuitions if academic concepts adhere to ambiguity in the form of context and action expansiveness.

4.4.3 Extending practitioners' knowledge

The second condition of practitioners' relevance construction, "extending", illustrates that practitioners have to consider academic knowledge as novel knowledge in order to construct it as relevant. Extending allows practitioners to enhance their experiences and intuitions, to meet their needs and to provide potential solutions to their problems. The analysis revealed three variations in relation to extending: practitioners' knowledge can be extended in the form of (3a) instruments, (3b) constructs and (3c) scientific framing.

Relating to the first variation of extending, practitioners consider academic knowledge as new instruments. Academic knowledge in the form of instruments means that practitioners consider scientific concepts as new procedures, guidance or processes with which to choose among courses of action or as a systematics for ordering. The following example relates to the academic concept of strategic issue management (Ansoff, 1980) and illustrates that this concept is considered as a new instrument, which allows the practitioner to extend his intuition. The practitioner, a general manager of the business unit of car manufacturer states,

> *However, the benefit was that it helps you with the core kind of reflection element. You're talking about strategic issues that are more or less intuitive and common sense but you're*

trying to get systematic about your insights and hopefully this more methodical reflection you might get your strategic issues better done in a project.

This statement shows that the practitioner implicitly refers to the concept of strategic issue management (Ansoff, 1980), which he considers as an extension in form of a (reflective) procedure. This procedure allows him to extend his intuitive way of understanding strategy.

Moreover, if academic knowledge are considered as new instruments, it allows practitioners to meet their professional needs. The following quote illustrates that the academic concept of global strategy developed by Ghemawat (2007) is considered as a new instrument to develop a global strategy that allows a senior director of a nanotechnology company to meet his need to present a global strategy to investors:

One concept, I'll apply it right now as I'm putting together some business plans with my company to start a subsidiary, so we're going to be raising a lot of money in the next few months and part of that presentation is going to be explaining to investors how we're going to penetrate globally. (...) Instead of just (...) presenting the story I believe now I'm going to be able to present it in a more precise (...) framework, so it gives you the discipline or the focus how (...) to package your ideas in a structured way and present them to other people in a logical well thought through fashion. To me, that's a very major advantage.

This quote illustrates that in this case, the scientific concept of global strategy (Ghemawat, 2007) allows the practitioner to extend his ability to present a global strategy by an instrument in form of a procedure, and to meet his need to coherently present the global strategy to other people.

Relating to the second variation of extending, academic knowledge can be considered as new constructs, i.e. new conceptualizations or causal relations. The next quote shows that new constructs allow practitioners to extend their experiences. The practitioner, a CEO of a sugar cane factory, refers to the concept of non-market strategy initially developed by Baron (1995) and further examined by Geroski (2003). He indicates that he considers the concept as a new construct of strategy, which allows him to extend his experiences with a company's internationalization:

(...) the market strategy is a very important thing to come in when our Australian company was coming to Switzerland. Switzerland is a very protective market and it's a very relationship-based market. (...) you may have the greatest and the latest product but you need to understand this mentality to sell to Swiss corporate. We were focussing on competitors, the suppliers, the drivers and the bargaining power and so forth. But through this stack of insight (...), we began to diversify our attention to non-market. Like, building

relationships, which comes to Switzerland, some official bureaucrats and what part the media is going to play and the NGOs. (...) We always thought let's go to the Swiss market and we know the players, we know the competition, we know the drivers, we know the market concentration (and) this is how we play the game. (...) the non-market side of the business (...) really opened that era where we were never exposed to it.

The description of the practitioner's experiences with market strategy shows that the new construct of non-market strategy allowed him to extend his experiences.

Relating to the third variation of extending, academic knowledge can also be considered as scientific framing, i.e., scientific language or jargon. The following quote refers to the concept of strategic issue management (Ansoff, 1980) and illustrates that a marketing account manager of an insurance company extends her experiences by scientific framing:

Overall I got a better understanding how a strategy is developed in our firm and that it follows exactly the procedure. And now I have a name for that.

Here, the practitioner considers the concept as providing the scientific terminology of strategic issue management, which allows her to extend her experiences with developing strategy.

Lastly, practitioners can also extend their knowledge in different ways on the basis of a single academic concept. The following quote shows that a scientific concept is considered as a new construct as well as a scientific framing, which allows a practitioner to extend her intuition. In this example, a pattent attorney refers to the concept of emerging markets by Geroski (2003):

I would say that it reaffirmed my intuitive way to look at a market [...]But I wouldn't have called it by this certain name,[emerging markets]. I wouldn't have had the names, and I wouldn't have been able to point to a diagram like the S-curve,[describing] that technology can advance exponentially.

Generally, the extending condition shows that practitioners consider academic knowledge as instruments, constructs and/or scientific framing that allows them to consider potential solutions to their contextual problems, meets their needs, and to extend their experiences and intuitions. If practitioners do not consider academic knowledge as an extension of their knowledge, it is not considered as relevant (instances of failures relating to "not extending" are provided below). In the next section, I will show in what way practitioners consider academic knowledge as relevant if they extend their knowledge on the basis of academic concepts.

4.4.4 Practitioners' construction of value

The analysis revealed that if practitioners match academic knowledge against their needs, problems, experiences and intuitions, and if they can extend their knowledge by instruments, constructs or scientific framing, they also need to consider academic knowledge as valuable for current or future organizational circumstances and practices in order to consider it as practically relevant. Regardless of whether academic knowledge is considered as an instrument, construct or scientific framing, practitioners can consider three different kinds of value: 4a) a legitimation, 4b) an improvement, or 4c) an innovation.

First, academic concepts can be considered valuable because they provide legitimation. Legitimation refers to justifications of courses of action and argumentations towards others as well as to a confirmation of chosen actions. For example, a marketing account manager of an insurance company refers to the concept of core competences (Prahalad & Hamel, 1990), which she considers as a construct of "success" that allows her to legitimize her decisions towards others:

> *The positioning of a firm alone is not sufficient for success, but to gain advantage through the elements of skills, competences and resources. This helps me argue in my current situation, with the limited resources on the one hand, and the increasing sales figures on the other hand and to explain my decisions to my boss and my team.*

Second, academic knowledge can be considered valuable in the form of improvement. Improvement refers to practitioners' consideration that academic concepts provide instruments, constructs or scientific framing that allow them to improve their *existing* professional practices, organizational processes or general understandings of situations. Thus, improvement can relate to refinements of either individual practices and understandings or organizational structures and processes. In the following quote, the CIO of a telecommunications company refers to the scientific concept of transitional objects developed by De Geus (1988), which he considers as a procedure to improve the process of strategic development:

> *I liked the concept of transitional object. Usually the CFO or CEO says something that he always says. And then you'll repeat every year the same. Applying this concept, this does not work anymore. The process prevents you from having empty platitudes in your strategy and that these platitudes show up in the goals and the priorities. The process forces you to get out of your protected space. [This way] the process better manages social aspects and helps better develop a strategy.*

This quote illustrates that the practitioner considers the concept of transitional objects (De Geus, 1988) as an instrument, which he matches against his experiences of developing strategy and “having empty platitudes”. In addition, this instrument allows him to extend his experiences with strategic development. This extension in turn allows him to improve “social aspects” of the strategy development process, i.e., the improvement of the commitment process of those affected with the development of strategy.

In addition to being considered as improvement, academic knowledge can also be considered as valuable in terms of an innovation. In contrast to improvement, which relates to a refinement of existing courses of action and understandings, innovation refers to *new* ways of thinking or alternative routes of action. Additionally, academic knowledge can be considered valuable in different ways, e.g., it can be equally considered as innovation and improvement. For example, an IT analyst at an international bank refers to the scientific concept of strategic issue management (Ansoff, 1980), which she considers as an instrument that allows her to consider a new way of identifying problems (innovation) and simultaneously to enhance her understanding of the decisions of the top management team (improvement):

> *(...) there is a big gap in our corporate strategy and our business unit strategy. So what the process helps me is (...) to better understand how and what is happening in the IT department, how are they trying to achieve the core strategy, help the bank in that way and (also) seeing where they're going wrong. So having to apply the concept to the bank (...) was really good, because some of the things that have come out (...) enable you to say it's this problem, this problem (...). So it expanded my mind and now I view everything differently. This way you better understand why you're company is doing certain things and now I know how problems can be identified. (...) I want to show the (application of the concept) to the head of IT strategy consulting in the bank. Just to see what he would say on it. Because I think there's some points in here that have been neglected when I look at the overall IT strategy (...), and which I think are valid points. So I think (...) it would be so helpful, not just for me, but I'm sure (also) for the people that I work with (...).*

This quote illustrates that the practitioner matches the concept of strategic issue management against the problems of implementing a corporate strategy in the practitioner’s IT department. From the practitioner’s point of view, the concept is considered as a potential solution to this problem in the form of a procedure (instrument), which allows her to extend her view on her contextual problems. This procedure is considered valuable because it allows her, on one hand, to innovate her way of analysing strategic implementation problems and, on the other hand, to improve her understanding of the organizational context.

In addition, improvement and innovation can also be considered on the basis of scientific framing. Typically, scientific framing is considered valuable because it confirms or allows legitimizing courses of action; however, in some cases, it can also allow practitioners to improve their actions and understandings. The following quote refers to the concept of absorptive capacity (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990), which the COO of an international airline considers as a scientific framing that allows her to better communicate with the CCO:

> *If I have to present something to the board of governance or to a competent audience, I can use the word 'absorptive capacity' because it allows embedding my presentation into a more scientific terminology. (…) It might also improve the way I communicate with the CCO.*

Generally, academic knowledge is constructed as relevant if practitioners consider it as valuable for their situations, actions or thinking. In this sense, academic knowledge can be considered valuable or relevant because it allows practitioners to innovate, improve and/or legitimize their thinking and acting. Practitioners consider these kinds of value independently of the ways in which they extend their knowledge, i.e. independent of their consideration of academic knowledge as instrument, construct or scientific framing. In addition, academic concepts can be considered as relevant in multiple ways. For example, practitioners mostly consider academic knowledge as legitimation in combination with either innovation or improvement (see Appendix 6 for the numbers of combinations of all kinds of value). However, under certain conditions, practitioners consider academic knowledge as irrelevant. In the next section, I will refer to failures of practitioners' relevance construction.

4.4.5 Failures in the construction of relevance

In the analysis, three conditions were identified that explain under what conditions practitioners do not consider academic knowledge as relevant: 5a) not matching, 5b) not extending and 5c) no value.

First, practitioners do not consider academic knowledge as relevant if it does not allow them to match academic concepts against their contexts or knowledge. In these cases, academic knowledge is not compatible with the structures of their organizations, with their experiences or their intuitions. An HR manager of a confectionery manufacturer describes that the academic concept of procedural justice developed by Kim & Mauborgne (1995) is not compatible with his experiences with agreeing upon the content of strategy:

My experience is that it's not true that we (achieve a commitment) that quickly. So I'm struggling to agree with that. Because in my company, I know what will happen: The moment someone opens the mouth and says something, you have eight other people jump into it. So I struggle to see this procedural justice happening in practice. (...) I see it as a Nordic thing, like that's the way they probably do it in Norway, where you go around the table, you share a voice, everyone says what (he or she) think(s), but then you still do what the boss says.

This quote illustrates that practitioners consider academic knowledge as irrelevant if it does not allow practitioners to match it against their experiences. Similarly, academic knowledge is considered as irrelevant if it does not allow practitioners to match it against their contextual problems, needs and intuitions.

Second, practitioners consider academic knowledge as irrelevant if academic concepts are not considered as novel knowledge. Put differently, if academic knowledge only allows for matching against practitioners' contextual problems and needs or their experiences and intuitions, it will not be considered as relevant. Thus, practitioners have to extend their existing knowledge on the basis of academic knowledge to consider it as practically relevant. For example, a CCO of a pharmaceutical company states that the concept of absorptive capacity (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990) does allow her to extend her knowledge:

I didn't learn new things. (…) For example, absorptive capacity, I knew what this is about and how one would do that (...). I got an exposure to all that (...) but do I need this? I don't know. (...) So I wouldn't say that now I got additional insights that I can apply (...) to my occupational context.

The CCO describes that she already knew "what the concept is about" and how organizations would develop these capacities. In this sense, the concept does not allow to extend her knowledge, but solely matches with what she knew before; thus it is not considered relevant.

Third, practitioners consider academic knowledge as irrelevant if it allows practitioners to match it against their contexts and knowledge and extends their knowledge but is not considered valuable for their professional practices or contextual problems. In this sense, practitioners extend their knowledge by instruments, constructs and scientific framing, but they do not consider it as valuable. In most cases, practitioners do not consider scientific concepts as valuable if they extend practitioners' ability to deal with the complexity of decision making and thus prevent them from considering academic knowledge as an innovation, improvement or legitimation. This is particularly the case with academic concepts in the form of constructs. Because constructs allow for many alternative courses of action or

many causal relations that could be taken into account, practitioners are overwhelmed by their choice among these possibilities. Although constructs typically allow practitioners to match and extend their knowledge, the number of choices that constructs provide prevent practitioners from considering these constructs as value for their professional practice or their particular contextual problems. For example, an account manager of a media house refers to the scientific concept of strategic issue management (Ansoff, 1980), which he matches against his experiences of developing strategy and which allows him to extend his experiences with a construct of strategy. However, this construct is not considered relevant because it is not considered as an operating mechanism to choose among possible routes of action:

> *Certainly this concept (…) really helps work out something different for the design of our process. (But) the problem is that (…) you have so many possibilities! Having tried to apply this concept, we realized that we have actually spent so much time discussing how it should work. You don't have any evidence that it's right. So what I was hoping to get is a procedure like when you distil schnapps: you start and at the end you have a concentrate and the machine determines the procedure. (Like) you make fire and then it vaporized and then it's concentrated. But here you can turn any lever and the result is completely different. And this doesn't give you the safety or the confidence of having developed an effective strategy. (…) So in effect strategy is about the gut feeling of a Steven Jobs or Richard Branson and (...) the rest is actually just rubbish.*

This quote illustrates that if academic concepts allow practitioners to consider multiple courses of actions, they are considered not only as irrelevant but also as common sense. The analysis reveals that practitioners typically do not consider academic knowledge as valuable if the concepts are ambiguous because they leave too much room for interpretation of their usage. Despite the finding that ambiguous concepts facilitate matching (as shown in the section above), the action expansiveness of ambiguous concepts can also impede practitioners from considering these concepts as relevant.

Academic concepts can also be considered as partly valuable. Because academic concepts allow practitioners to extend their knowledge in multiple ways, such as for example, because they are considered as a scientific framings as well as a construct, these different extensions can be considered as valuable and not valuable. For example, a strategic marketing manager of a logistics company refers to the academic concept of means-ends (Simon, 1978), which he considers as a construct of strategy that, on the one hand, allows him to extend his experiences with designing strategic processes, which he considers as an innovation, in this case, a new way of thinking; on the other hand, this concept allows him to extend his

experiences with scientific framing; however, this extension is considered as irrelevant as the practitioner does not consider it as value for the strategic design process:

> *[The main point is] the design of the process of strategy, it's about connections, about logic, it's partly about maths. Maths, in the sense of action-reaction. This has a high practical value that I learn to contextualize and to evaluate in this sense. (...) The point is that you realize that every strategic issue that you add will have a follow-up element. (...) Often in strategy you think about an issue but then you stop and you don't think about the next steps (...). It provides a relational and consequential thinking. (...) Now I can call it means-ends but (in fact), it's action reaction or action result, that's how you talk in business.(...) the fact that it is called means to an end, it sounds so deceptive. (...) This means to an end is like, oh my God, you're thinking that maybe something is going to come from heaven. I don't understand why people call it like that; it's probably not something that I will apply to my vocabulary.*

This quote illustrates that because academic concepts allow practitioners' to extend their knowledge in different ways, practitioners can simultaneously consider academic knowledge as relevant and irrelevant.

Generally, practitioners consider academic knowledge as irrelevant if it solely matches their contexts and knowledge, if it does not allow practitioners to extend their knowledge or if it is not considered as valuable for their organizational contexts and professional practices. In most of the cases, academic knowledge is not considered as relevant because it does not allow practitioners to extend their knowledge or because it was not considered as valuable (see Appendix 6 of the number of failures for each condition).

4.5 Discussion

This paper examines under what conditions practitioners consider academic knowledge as practically relevant. On the basis of practitioners' accounts of relevance, a theoretical model of practitioners' relevance construction was developed that revealed three main insights. First, practitioners consider academic concepts as relevant only if practitioners match academic knowledge against their contexts and knowledge, extend their knowledge and consider the value of academic knowledge for their contexts and actions. Second, practitioners construct academic concepts as different types of knowledge, such as instruments, constructs and scientific framing, that allow them to improve, legitimize or innovate their thinking and acting. Third, although the ambiguity of academic knowledge increases the likelihood that practitioners consider academic knowledge as relevant, it can also lead to the construction of

irrelevance when ambiguous knowledge provides multiple courses of action. In the following section, these findings and their implications for understanding practical relevance are discussed, particularly (1) the extension of practitioners' knowledge and the consideration of value of academic knowledge as preconditions for practitioners' construction of practical relevance, (2) the differentiation of types of knowledge and kinds of value, and (3) the role of ambiguity in the construction of relevance.

4.5.1 Extension of practitioners' knowledge and consideration of value as preconditions for practical relevance

The literature on practical relevance proposes that academic knowledge needs to be adapted to a particular organizational context to be practically relevant. In this sense, scholars speak of "resonance" or "fit" to stress that practitioners consider academic concepts as practically relevant if these concepts are aligned with practitioners' particular organizational contexts (Seidl, 2007; Rasche & Behnam, 2009; Nicolai & Dautwitz, 2010). The findings of this study confirm that practitioners' must consider academic knowledge as compatible with their contextual needs and problems in order to construct it as relevant. Thus, resonance in the form of matching academic concepts against practitioners' contexts and knowledge is an important precondition of constructing academic knowledge as relevant. However, the theoretical model of practitioners' relevance construction also extends this view by providing two additional conditions of constructing academic knowledge as relevant.

First, this study shows that in order to consider academic knowledge as relevant, practitioners have to extend their knowledge by academic knowledge. As Rasche and Behnam (2009: 251) state, academic concepts "are non-contextualized and therefore require a competent filling according to the specific circumstances (...), a filling that also means modification and extension of existing knowledge claims". In this sense, academic knowledge has to allow practitioners to combine their existing with novel, academic knowledge. Practitioners have to be able to match what they experience, know or face against academic knowledge while extending this existing knowledge by new instruments, constructs or scientific language. Conversely, this study shows that if practitioners solely match academic knowledge against their contextual problems, needs and existing knowledge, academic knowledge will be considered as irrelevant if practitioners cannot extend their knowledge. In other words, academic knowledge that does not extend what practitioners already knew or experienced does not allow practitioners to consider this knowledge as relevant.

Second, this study shows that beyond extending, practitioners must consider academic knowledge as valuable for their thinking and acting in order to construct it as relevant. This means that according to practitioners' individual contextual problems and knowledge, academic knowledge provides particular extensions that need to be considered as value to be relevant to their situations. Conversely, this study shows that academic knowledge that is simply matched against practitioners' contexts and knowledge and simply extends practitioners' knowledge is still considered as irrelevant if practitioners do not consider it as value for their particular situations and professional practices.

These findings have important implications for our understanding of practical relevance. First, complementing previous studies that argue that academic knowledge is relevant if it resonates with practitioners' particular contexts (Nicolai & Dautwitz, 2010; Rasche & Behnam, 2009; Seidl, 2007), this study shows that resonance is an important precondition for practitioners' construction of relevance. But to be considered relevant, academic knowledge also needs to allow practitioners to extend their knowledge and to consider academic knowledge as valuable. Thus, in addition to resonance, extending and the consideration of value are necessary conditions to construct academic knowledge as relevant. These conditions prove helpful in explaining why academic knowledge is considered irrelevant even if it resonates with practitioners' contexts. The theoretical model of practitioners' relevance construction explains under what conditions practitioners consider academic knowledge as relevant. It thus contributes to our understanding of how practitioners make sense of academic knowledge.

Practitioners' relevance construction, and, in particular, the precondition of matching practitioners' contexts has important implications for organizational reproduction and change. As practitioners consider academic knowledge as relevant if it is compatible to their contexts and knowledge, practitioners' relevance construction tends to reproduce existing organizational structures in which practitioners' contextual problems and needs might be embedded. In this sense, practitioners' matching of academic knowledge against their existing organizational contexts might lead to reproducing these structures regardless of whether these structures are beneficial or obstructive to the functioning of the organization. Thus, because practitioners match academic knowledge against their contexts to construct relevance, this construction might hinder a fundamental change of the organizational context or an organization's capacity to innovate.

Secondly, the existing literature on practical relevance emphasizes that practical relevance is dependent on the particular context. This study shows that in addition to practitioners considering academic knowledge as relevant in light of their contexts, they also construct relevance in light of their individual experiences and intuition. Although some studies have shown that academic knowledge is relevant if it resonates with practitioners' lived experience (Corburn, 2005; Nicolai & Dautwitz, 2010), this study shows that practical relevance also depends on whether their experiences and intuitive thinking can be valuably extended. Taking individual practitioners' individual knowledge into account allows us to understand that academic knowledge can be considered irrelevant if it does not allow practitioners to match academic knowledge against their contexts and knowledge, to extend their knowledge or to consider the value of academic knowledge in light of their practical knowledge. In this sense, the conditions of matching, extending and considering a value reveals the dynamics between academic and practical knowledge and the forms of relevance that these dynamics entail.

In relation to this point, the study shows that in light of their different knowledge and contexts, practitioners differently construct the same academic knowledge as relevant. Because relevance requires an active construction on behalf of the practitioners in light of their particular contexts and previous knowledge, the practical relevance of particular academic knowledge cannot be generalized to all contexts and practitioners' individual interests. This implies that the conditions of matching, extending and the consideration of value apply to all contexts and individual situations but the particular ways in which practitioners match academic knowledge to their contexts and knowledge, extend their knowledge and consider academic knowledge as relevant depends on their idiosyncratic constructions of relevance.

The conceptualization of relevance as an idiosyncratic construction also takes account of the "knowledge constitutive interests" (Habermas, 1973) that practitioners pursue in their relevance construction. In this sense, practitioners construct academic knowledge as relevant if it allows them to consider academic knowledge as value to pursue their personal interests, such as for example, legitimizing their decisions or improving their practices to exert power. This implies that practitioners' individual construction of relevance is not necessarily related to improving practice or considering a value for others, but might be even detrimental to other contexts or society at large. In this sense, at best, practitioners' relevance construction "may lead to the resolution of conflicts in management practice and the development of just

organizations; at worst, it may cement social imbalances and marginalization of powerless groups" (Jarzabkowski, Mohrman, Scherer, 2010: 1193)

4.5.2 The differentiation of types of knowledge and kinds of value

In line with prior research, the findings of this study confirm that practitioners construct instruments, constructs and scientific framing as the main types of knowledge that management science provides (Nicolai & Seidl, 2010; Beyer & Trice, 1982). However, previous studies on forms of relevance do not differentiate between practitioners' construction of the types of knowledge that academic concepts provide to them and the different kinds of value that practitioners consider. Distinguishing types of knowledge and kinds of value contributes to the literature on forms of relevance in three main ways.

First, the theoretical model of practitioners' relevance construction shows that in light of their particular contextual problems and previous knowledge, practitioners may consider instruments, constructs and scientific framing as sources to improve, innovate or legitimize their thoughts and actions. Whereas previous literature on the forms of relevance assume that instrumental knowledge helps practitioners to choose among courses of action, symbolic knowledge helps them to legitimize a chosen course of action and conceptual knowledge helps to better understand situations, this study shows that, from the practitioners' perspective, a particular type of knowledge is not necessarily related to a particular kind of value.

Second, differentiating between types of knowledge and kinds if value shows that practitioners consider different kinds of knowledge that academic knowledge provides but practitioners do not necessarily consider these kinds of knowledge as relevant. Prior literature on the forms of relevance depicts instruments, constructs and scientific framing as forms of practical relevance. However, the findings of this study show that these different forms of relevance, or types of knowledge as they are called here, are considered as relevant only if practitioners consider them as valuable for their contexts and professional practices. In this sense, different types of knowledge are not constructed as relevant as such but they need to be considered as valuable in order to be practically relevant.

Lastly, the model of practitioners' relevance construction shows that practitioners often do not consider a single type of knowledge as relevant in one way. Instead, practitioners may construct multiple types of knowledge of a single academic concept, and a single type of

knowledge can also be considered valuable in multiple ways. As previous studies on forms of relevance (Nicolai & Seidl, 2010; Pelz, 1978) do not discuss whether academic knowledge can be relevant in multiple ways, this study refines our understanding of practical relevance by showing that practitioners can consider a combination of types of knowledge and multiple kinds of value. This finding implies that academic knowledge is not simply constructed as relevant or irrelevant. By considering different types of knowledge at the same time, such as an instrument and a construct, practitioners can consider academic knowledge as equally relevant and irrelevant because one type of knowledge is considered as valuable, whereas the other may be considered as irrelevant.

4.5.3 The ambiguous role of ambiguity

In line with previous studies (Astley & Zammuto, 1992; Rasche & Behnam, 2009; Seidl, 2007) on the role of ambiguity in achieving relevance, this study shows that ambiguous academic knowledge facilitates practitioners' matching of academic knowledge against their contexts by allowing them to consider academic knowledge as compatible to their diverse contexts and practices. Specifically, it is shown that ambiguous academic knowledge facilitates the matching against practitioners' contextual needs, problems, experiences and intuitions. In this sense, ambiguous scientific concepts allow actors to make sense of academic knowledge independent of their concrete contexts and experiences (Astley & Zammuto, 1992; Nicolai & Dautwitz, 2010). In addition to confirming previous studies' findings, the theoretical model of practitioners' relevance construction also extends the existing view on the role of ambiguity by differentiating two dimensions of ambiguous academic knowledge.

Examining the practitioners' perspective on the practical relevance of academic concepts reveals that ambiguous academic concepts are action and context expansive. Whereas differentiating between action and context expansiveness does not affect practitioners' matching of academic knowledge against their contexts and knowledge as both dimensions contribute to the compatibility of academic knowledge with practitioners' contextual needs, problems, experiences and intuitions, this differentiation affects whether practitioners consider academic knowledge as valuable. Whereas the context expansiveness of ambiguous academic knowledge facilitates the construction of academic knowledge as valuable, action expansiveness of ambiguous knowledge does not. As the context expansiveness of ambiguous knowledge appeals to a broad range of organisational contexts, it does not restrict

practitioners' meaning making in light of their various contexts but allows the meaningful adaptation of knowledge to a plurality of contexts. In this sense, context expansiveness does not prevent practitioners from considering academic knowledge as valuable for their contextual problems and needs. By contrast, the action expansiveness of ambiguous knowledge does not facilitate considering academic knowledge as valuable. If ambiguous academic knowledge provides a range of possible courses of action or different ways of understanding a situation, as in the case of constructs, practitioners do not consider this type of knowledge as valuable because they are uncertain which of the potential routes of action is most meaningful or valuable for their contexts. As action expansiveness leaves the particular usage of academic concepts uncertain (Benders & van Bijsterveld, 2000), it does not prescribe which courses of action to follow. In this sense, practitioners are overwhelmed by the complexity that the choice between multiple routes of action implies. Thus, action expansiveness, on one hand, fosters practitioners' ability to envision multiple courses of action; however, on the other hand, it prevents practitioners to consider ambiguous academic knowledge that is action expansive as valuable. These two sides to ambiguity can also be applied to ambiguous academic concepts that are considered as scientific framing. To the extent that academic concepts are considered as multiple scientific justifications, these justifications might appear arbitrary, and consequently, they might not be considered as valuable (Nicolai & Seidl, 2010).

Differentiating between the dimensions of action and context expansiveness of ambiguous academic knowledge shows that the role of ambiguity in contributing to practitioners' construction of relevance is itself ambiguous. Previous studies implicitly assume that the more ambiguous the academic knowledge is, the greater is the opportunity for practitioners to make sense of academic knowledge in light of their particular contexts (Astley & Zammuto, 1992; Rasche & Behnam, 2009; Seidl, 2007). However, by differentiating between action and context expansiveness, this study shows that ambiguous academic knowledge might be considered as irrelevant. Academic concepts that are action expansive increase the complexity of having to choose a course of action that is considered as most valuable for practitioners' contexts and needs. Thus, academic knowledge may complicate practitioners' understanding of a situation (Bartunek, Gordon, & Weathersby, 1983); however, at the same time, this complication may lead to constructing academic knowledge as irrelevant. This is particularly the case with new constructs, as practitioners do not consider them as providing generalized rules or prescriptions to choose among courses of action (Nicolai & Seidl, 2010; Bartunek et al., 2011). However, various scholars state that the contextual nature of knowledge in

management limits the possibility to generate standardized rules or prescriptions that allow for prescriptions of particular courses of action (Nicolai & Seidl, 2010; Pandza & Thorpe, 2010; Whitley, 1984; Tourish, 2013). As Mintzberg (2005: 381) states, "managers can and should use dialogue to find answers to their questions instead of expecting readymade prescriptions. Prescriptions are most of all the job of practitioners themselves as they face an issue within a context". This study shows that in some cases, practitioners expect prescriptions or at least ambiguous academic concepts that deliver the ground on which such prescriptions can be developed.

4.6 Limitations and future research

The results of this study are based on a qualitative study of practitioners' construction of relevance, which places some limitations on this paper while opening up areas for future research. First, this study focuses on practitioners' construction of relevance in the context of executive education. This context provides practitioners with a particular kind of exposure to academic knowledge as academic knowledge was taught, discussed and reflected in the classroom. Thus, examining practitioners' construction of relevance in other settings might lead to different results if practitioners do not reflect and discuss academic knowledge before they are asked in what way they consider it as relevant. Future research could thus investigate practitioners' construction of relevance in other settings, such as, for example in more experimentally designed settings, in which practitioners could read articles published in academic journals and would then be asked whether the findings provided by these articles are considered as relevant. Specifically, future research could explore whether reading academic results affects practitioners' construction of ambiguous academic knowledge as relevant or their construction of the kinds of knowledge that management research provides.

Second, this study is based on interviews to examine practitioners' relevance construction. Qualitative interview methods are typically criticised for confronting interviewees with the "social desire" to be responsive to the interviewers needs (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). In this sense, interviewing practitioners about their relevance construction could be influenced by the prompts to reflect on the ways in which academic knowledge is relevant to them. This study counteracts this potential "bias" by integrating observational data in the analysis, however, future research could draw on different methods to examine practitioners' relevance construction, such as for example, ethnographic methods, which allow the researcher to study

how managers ‘live’ and experience academic knowledge form the natives’ point of view (Geertz, 1993; Yanow, 2012).

Future research could also explore the effect of practitioners’ relevance construction on their organizational practices. As some scholars claim that practitioners’ construction of relevance has "far-reaching effects on practical action” (Astley & Zammuto; 1992: 543), future work could investigate the particular ways in which practitioners’ construction influences their actions. This area for future research could address the following questions: In what way does the construction of the practical relevance of scientific concepts influence the actual legitimation, improvement or innovation of practitioners’ practices? How do different constructions of relevance impact practitioners' actions in applying an academic concept? And how does the plurality of constructions in organizational contexts influence practitioners’ decision to apply academic concepts?

Another topic that could be further explored is the reproduction and change of organizational structures and practices on the basis of practitioners’ relevance construction. As mentioned earlier, practitioners match academic knowledge against their contexts and knowledge, which tends to reproduce organizational structures. In this sense, future research could investigate the possibilities of (fundamental) organizational change given that academic knowledge has to match an organizational context in order to be adopted. This topic could be investigated particularly in light of critical management scholars as "academic knowledge that is relevant influences the power balance in organizational practice" (Jarzabkowski, Mohrman, Scherer, 2010: 1193), They argue that practical relevance leads to “championing the cause of the oppressed at the risk of further contributing to their domination” (Fournier & Grey, 2000: 26). Future research could thus explore specifically in what ways practitioners’ relevance construction contributes to the reproduction of the dominant power structures within organizational contexts. Additionally, it could be further explored in what ways practitioners’ relevance construction that serves their individual interests proves also socially useful (Willmott, 2003; Scherer, 2009), thereby contributing to the interests of a plurality of stakeholders.

4.7 Conclusion

Even though the literature on practical relevance emphasizes that practice itself ultimately determines whether academic knowledge is practically relevant, the particular ways in which practitioners construct relevance have not been examined yet. Analysing practitioners' accounts of the relevance of academic concepts, it was found that practitioners consider academic knowledge as relevant if they match academic knowledge against their organizational contexts and previous knowledge, extend their knowledge by instruments, constructs and scientific framing and consider academic knowledge as valuable for their contexts and actions. This study thus provides a novel understanding of relevance from the perspective of practitioners, which contributes to the literature on practical relevance in the two main ways. First, this study offers an understanding of the conditions under which practitioners construct academic knowledge as relevant before they apply it to their concrete contexts. Second, it contributes to the understanding of the limits of ambiguous academic knowledge, especially if academic knowledge provides multiple routes of action.

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Appendix 1

Supporting evidence for "matching" condition

No	Concept	Exemplary quotes	Code
61	Competitive strategy (Porter, 1997)	A managing editor of a public-service broadcaster describes the need to position a public-service broadcasting company towards an increasing number of competitors in the media industry: "**In media industry positioning is particularly important because the question is how much (financial) support channels governed by public law will get in the future and how strong they are regulated or not.** (...) The channels governed by public law didn't care about positioning or finding themselves in the market in the past. Nowadays they have to care about positioning because the market is just evolving. In the past there were just public channels so de facto there was no market. And then it was suddenly possible to watch the channels from another country (with the same language), i.e. there was an international rivalry. And then the private channels came up and so it became really important to position oneself."	Matching contextual need to position organization
15	Strategic issue management (Ansoff, 1980)	A chief physician of a business unit in a hospital refers to the need of an approach to structure strategy: "I need to realize that in the public healthcare I won't instigate a discussion with the CEO whether we should follow Porter or another model. **So it's rather important that I bring a perspective, an approach how to proceed or how to structure the process**. Simply that you are able to show how you could structure a strategy process. (...)	Matching need of procedure
20	Outside-in view on strategy (Ansoff, 1965; Porter, 1997)	The CEO of the federal police department states the need to position his department: " (...) in administration we have to care much more about positioning. **We still live from hand to mouth. (...) especially in crime fighting, the question is "do we fight against the Italian organized criminality or against the Russian or the Chinese or do we fight against the motorcycle gangs?**"	Matching need to position business unit
40	Resource-based view (Barney, 1991)	As senior physician refers to the need to talk to other departments in a hospital in the management language: "Before I thought we need that for the patients. But that's not my interest. The others will think of value creation and growth and so on. **But if you have to work with these other administrative departments, you have to talk in their language.** You can't talk Latin with them how I sometimes do with my colleagues."	Matching need to talk in management language

17	Organizational design (Donaldson, 2001)	A chief physician of a hospital describes the problem of the current organizational structure in the hospital: "**The public health care suffers from the silo thinking** and it helped to see other organizational designs, (...) in which the structure is turned upside down. (...) **In the medical sector that's extreme, we have a medical hospital, a surgical hospital, a gynaecological hospital e.g. and if we would turn that we could see what connects theses hospitals or what is the same across hospitals**, like in-patient and out-patient processes, administrative processes etc."	Matching context problem of inefficient organizational design
73	Market institutions (Fligstein, 1996)	A business manager at the stock market explains the problem of being stuck in a strategy: "(...) **many a times organisations are stuck in one strategy (and they claim that) this is the framework that we built, it's worked for 20 or 30 years ago, it should work now. It's like (...) doing the same thing over and over again** and that's what Wall Street's right now is currently on, it's an insane path trying to figure out how to make money based on the old models. (...) Based on the framework I see the opportunity to actually start breaking that strategy that Wall Street has (...)."	Matching contextual problem of being stuck in strategy
80	Entrepreneurial agency (Santos & Eisenhardt, 2009)	A project manager in a start-up company states the need to make forecasts: "The thing I found really interesting was that concept of having to be half a step in the future but like, not too far in the future so that the ideas should be not too crazy or too out there and **I think that's really useful because that's sort of what we're trying to do**, it's a new mine development, so we're trying to predict where it's going and what they're going to need. (...)."	Matching need to make forecasts
26	Outside-in view on strategy (Ansoff, 1965; Porter, 1997)	A project manager at a consulting firm relates the concept of inside-out and outside-in on strategy to his experiences with strategy development: "**We often have strategy meetings where we intuitively applied the inside-out/outside-in perspective** but the framework helps to do that in a more structured way and to pay attention to all possible aspects. (...) So e.g. usually we said these are our competences and this is the market and we will do something, but we never consciously asked ourselves: Does my firm adjust to the market or does the market adjust to my firm?"	Matching experience with strategy development
45	Transitional object (De Geus, 1988)	The CIO of a telecommunication company describes his experience with developing strategy relating it to the concept of transitional object: "**Usually the CFO or CEO says something that he always says**. **And then you'll repeat every year the same**. Applying this concept, this does not work anymore."	Matching experience with process of strategy development

51	Strategic issue management (Ansoff, 1980)	A HR director of a confectionery manufacturer describes his experiences with the process of strategy development in the following way: "**I've facilitated strategy sessions but never like this**. It's always been different. My starting point is always what has happened before, not like starting with a blank piece of paper, just saying, ok, tell me what you think about the future and the specific issues. (...) The process: going from generic issues, transforming this into strategy and then coming down to priorities, then to objectives and then into business calls and then again into corporate goals. You go from very detailed stuff to very high level stuff down to detail again, which I believe is very good because the best strategists have both views and can go from one to the other very quickly, very easily."	Matching experience with process of strategy development
57	Incentive systems (Bebchuk & Fried, 2006)	The CEO of a hotel relates the concept of to his experience with incentive systems: "Often you have an idealized picture of strategy regarding e.g. what corporations communicate in their mission statements. "The costumer is king" or "We are committed to our shareholders". **But if you dig deeper in the topic and if you deal with incentive systems e.g. and compare this with your experiences,** then you see that these are different worldviews. (...) The question is always whether the model comprises overall mechanisms and if I turn one thing then something should happen. If you have practical experience that's an advantage to see whether this (mechanism) could be related to one's own context. If you hear that right after school and you have never done a strategy, you might get a wrong impression or you're not able to relate that to something or apply that. But with practical experience this cognitive relation is easier to do (...)."	Matching experiences with incentive systems
68	Market strategy (Geroski, 2003)	The CEO of a sugar cane factory relates the concept of market strategy to his experience of implementing strategy: "(...) **we did strategy implementation without this exposure for seven or eight years in Australia.** Now we have learned market strategy. So we were initially beginning to apply this concept without knowing its real dynamics. Now we know "okay this is how this framework works, these are the pros and these are the cons; this is where we can apply this framework". And applying this concept we see already now significant change, especially in strategy (...)."	Matching experience with implementing strategy
81	Models of innovation (Afuah, 1998)	A project manager at a car manufacturing company "I always tell people that doing a lean or six sigma project, all that means is that I'm taking some of the tools that are in that toolbox, there are sort of classic projects where you go through one set of tools that have been linked together but in many projects I will take individual tools, where they're applicable, and **it's the same thing here I feel that I'm being given a new set of tools** that I can use and when I'm confronted with problems then I'll be able to think about which tool is most applicable and then apply it."	Matching experiences of ways of problem solving

21	Strategic issue management (Ansoff, 1980)	A project manager at an international airport states that he would have known the relationships between strategic issues intuitively: "I have never developed a strategy myself but **intuitively all the relationships between strategic initiation, change etc. were known** but to put that in a framework and show the process was new (..)"	Matching intuition on relationships between strategic issues
49	Procedural justice (Kim & Mauborgne, 1995)	The CEO of an IT consultancy refers the concept of procedural justice and links it to his intuition on managing people: "I think it is all about understanding people, the methodologies, and as much as we say that we cannot put people into boxes, I would now say you probably can. You can put them in jars and tip them in different boxes (...) and if you are able to understand that aspect, then you are able to kind of manage the whole situation better. **Strategy, it is all about intuitive matters, like communication, it is about people, it is about the ability (...) to structure the way forward**, creating a better plan for the business, but without people really that does not work."	Matching intuition on issues related to strategy
67	Strategic issue management (Ansoff, 1980)	A general manager at a stock exchange market describes that the concept of matches his intuition on strategic issues: "(...) the benefit was that it helps you with the core kind of reflection element. **You're talking about strategic things that are more or less intuitive and common sense** but you're trying to get systematic about your insights and hopefully this more methodical reflection you might get your strategic issues better done in a project."	Matching intuition on strategic issues

*Note that some concepts have been renamed by labels of more general concepts on the same topic to ensure compliance with the confidentiality agreement

Appendix 2

Supporting evidence for "Dimensions of ambiguity"

No	**Concept**	**Exemplary quotes**	**Code**
39	Procedural justice (Kim & Mauborgne, 1995)	The HR director of a confectionery manufacturer describes that the concept of procedural justice does not comply with his organizational context "My experience is that it's not true that we do it that quickly. So I'm struggling to agree with that. **Because in my company, I know what will happen: The moment someone opens the mouth and says something, you have eight other people jump into it. So I struggle to see this procedural justice happening in practice.** (...) I see it as a Nordic thing, like that's the way they probably do it in Norway, where you go around the table, you share a voice, everyone says what they think, but then you still do what the boss says."	Context expansiveness

71	Creative destruction (Schumpeter, 1950)	The co head of department of a bank states that the concept of creative destruction can be linked to many different contexts "(...) **particularly interesting was the concept on creative destruction (...) because it could be applied to all kind of industries.** I mean you see it at Microsoft and Nokia, and Apple and so forth. So it was shown that it is highly relevant."	Context expansiveness
79	Value appropriation (Reitzig & Puranam, 2009)	The CEO of sugar cane factory states that he cannot relate the concept of value appropriation to his organizational context as it assumes a specific market structure that contradicts the emerging market structure, in which his company operates "(...) in the class everybody's been working for the last 15 or 20 years, there are many CEOs here and **they also said that some of the concepts can never be applied at work. (For example) a lot of emerging markets are structured (differently).** So you know, whilst we follow all this innovation with IP protection and stuff, you take it to some part of Asia and someone copies your design and that's it. You can go to the court and try and enforce your patent rights, but it will take you 10 years. So some things that you should be cautious about."	Context expansiveness
63	Outside-in view on strategy (Ansoff, 1965; Porter, 1997)	The head of department and member of the executive board of a family business states that " (...) I work in an SME. However some concepts are very focused on strategies of large corporations, which is different from how a SME operates. There are two realities: there are strategies for large corporations in a large global economy and the strategies of niches players, like my corporations. And those realities are very different. (...) **If you take positioning and analyse where you are in a Porter analysis, (like) who are my suppliers, what is the market and what are my cash cows etc., that is also valid for a SME. I would say that these kinds of concepts are interesting for every company, whether it's big or small**."	Context expansiveness
37	Procedural justice (Kim & Mauborgne, 1995)	A IT consultant describes that the concept of procedural justice does not allow for different kinds of actions as it assumes that people would sit together (face to face) to achieve commitment "(...) there are certain aspects that you also need to study, which is (...) technology, where it affects me, and other people at day to day basis. (...) and hence we should be focusing really on technological aspects of strategy. And by technological aspects I am not talking about software, I am not talking about hardware, I am talking about ways of thinking. You know, how can we deal with a specific situation, where technology can probably assist you, jump three hurdles as opposed to face to face or whatever it is (...). **The global climate, the fact that (...) strategy right now is not a single (...), face to face type environment like (...) groups sitting together in a meeting for an hour, I am sorry, that is not an option (...)**."	Action expansiveness

70	Strategic issue management (Ansoff, 1980)	A general manager of a business unit of car manufacturer describes that the concept allows for multiple courses of action and can thus be relevant to a range of professional practices " (…) **the concept helps me seeing multiple ways, so in that sense they have relevance to what I'm doing and lots of others are doing**."	Action expansiveness
73	Market institutions (Fligstein, 1996)	A business manager at the stock market explains the concept of market institutions does not prescribe a particular course of action but provides a general perspective that allows for multiple interpretations "(the concept) doesn't say, this is how it should be. One of my comments in class was "plug and trug", a "plug and trug" is basically a term put into a spreadsheet, let the numbers come out and this is how it's supposed to be. **(However this concept) relate to a broad thinking. (When) you're supposed to provide an answer, it doesn't say this is what you should do**."	Action expansiveness
31	Strategic issue management (Ansoff, 1980)	A project manager of a business consultancy states that the model allows for multiple courses of action to develop a strategy "(**the concept) shows how you methodically develop a strategy, a model that helps you thinking in options. There is no right or wrong** but you have to evaluate yourself how you would do that in the right way."	Action expansiveness

Appendix 3

Supporting evidence for "extending" condition

No	**Concept**	**Exemplary quotes**	**Code**
15	Strategic issue management (Ansoff, 1980)	A chief physician of a business unit in a hospital states that the need of an approach to structure strategy is extended by a systematic procedure to develop strategy: "**So it's (…) important that I bring a perspective, an approach how to proceed or how to structure the process.** Simply that you are able to show how you could structure a strategy process. (...). **I have learned how to structure a strategy process.** (..) That is, I can justify what are the steps in a strategy process. That there is a framework that shows you clearly how to proceed but it's still not dogmatic."	Extending by instruments
19	Strategic issue management (Ansoff, 1980)	A divisional director and president of the board of directors of an electric company describes that the problem of developing strategy in his firm is extended by a procedure how to develop strategy: "**I see (…) that the process in our firm is casual and unrewarding. Now I know much better how we should develop our strategy.** (..) So I think the framework is really helpful but (...) if I can apply the framework depends a lot on the support I get (...)."	Extending by instruments

42	Procedural justice (Kim & Mauborgne, 1995)	The CEO of an IT consultancy describes the extension of his need to change by the concept of procedural justice that provides a behavioural guidance: "(...) I am very dominant, and I tend to talk a lot, in case you have not noticed, (...) and so just for example **the procedural justice thing, (...) it gave us a lot (like) learn to stop talking, learn to listen, it is vital for you to learn to listen. Especially when you are a consultant, (...) it is more important for you to talk a lot less and let other people talk, than you talking more.** In my area, in IT, I am the one who does the talking pretty much in the majority of the cases. (But) I need to actually allow other people to talk. The inside, be it focused on the project at hand or not, can be very valuable for the picture."	Extending by instruments
74	Global strategy (Ghemawat, 2007)	The senior director of a nanotechnology company states that the need to form alliances has been extended by a procedure for developing a global strategy: "Global strategy is very important in my business as there's a lot of essential interaction between companies like mine that are in nanotechnology (...) and large multinational pharmaceutical companies, and biotechnology companies. **So (...) it has been very helpful actually already in (...) having more robust well thought through approaches as we start to form alliances with some of these very large, large companies**."	Extending by instruments
11	Core competencies (Prahalad & Hamel, 1990)	A marketing account manager of a business unit of an insurance company describes that her need to argue her strategic decisions is extended by the causal relation between competitive advantage and success:"**The positioning of a firm alone is not sufficient for success, but to gain advantage through the elements of skills, competences and resources**. This helps me to argue in my current situation with the limited resources on the one hand and the increasing sales figures on the other hand (...)."	Extending by construct
80	Entrepre-neurial agency (Santos & Eisenhardt, 2009)	A project manager in a start-up company describes that the concept of entrepreneurial agency provides a new construct that extends the start-up's need to predict the future: "The thing I found really interesting (..) was (...) **that concept of having to be half a step in the future but like, not too far in the future so that the ideas should be not too crazy or too out there and I think that's really useful because that's sort of what we're trying to do, we're kind of trying to predict, it's a new mine development, so we're trying to predict where it's going and what they're going to need**."	Extending by construct

17	Organizational structure (Donaldson, 2001)	A chief physician of a business unit in a hospital states that the need of an approach to structure strategy is extended by a systematic procedure to develop strategy: "**The public health care suffers from the silo thinking and it helped to see different organizational designs** (..) in which the structure is turned upside-down. (...) In the medical sector that's extreme, we have a medical hospital, a surgical hospital, a gynaecological hospital e.g. and if we would turn that we could see what connects theses hospitals or what is the same across hospitals, like in-patient and out-patient processes, administrative processes etc. But no one wants that because no one wants to lose his or her position as chief physician. **But it will come and thus it's good to talk about it and to know the advantages and disadvantages to be able to talk about these changes**."	Extending by construct
10	Strategic issue management (Ansoff, 1980)	The CFO of an IT company describes the extension of his experiences with developing strategy by a checklist that is able to cover all important aspects: **"Usually when you develop strategy** (...) you start somewhere, e.g. with brainstorming and then you try to put everything in an order. Then you're not sure whether you have covered all aspects. (...) **So the procedure helps to ask the right questions and helps seeing whether I use the right tools and the right starting point or the right information. So if you do strategy it's important not only to look at products but to ask where do I want to go overall and how is that part of the strategy process.** (...) I know it from my own experience that you simply do a workshop in a room full of flipcharts and then you start. But the moderation is missing because of that the result is not bad or worse but you might not have covered all aspects (..)."	Extending experiences by instruments
45	Transitional object (De Geus, 1988)	The CIO of a telecommunication company states that his experiences with the development of strategy are extended by a procedure to develop strategies: "I liked the concept of transitional object. **Usually the CFO or CEO says something that he always says.** And then you'll repeat every year the same. Applying this concept, this does not work anymore. **The process prevents you from having empty platitudes in your strategy and that these platitudes show up in the goals and the priorities.** The process forces you to get out of your protected space. (...) the process better manages social aspects and helps to better develop a strategy. It gives you new spaces and it's hard not to use them."	Extending experiences by instruments
29	Strategic issue management (Ansoff, 1980)	A marketing account manager of a business unit of an insurance company perceives that her experiences with strategy projects is extended by a procedure how to structure future projects: "**I have worked in several strategy projects** but I've never seen these steps and **now I know what would be the ideal procedure**. That doesn't mean that I will go exactly through all steps in detail in future projects but (...) I know how I could move or should move, and with which tools; and that helps me to better structure my work and also to better communicate or sell how I would like to realize my plan."	Extending experiences by instruments

26	Outside-in view on strategy (Ansoff, 1965; Porter, 1997)	A project manager at a consulting firm states that he extended his experiences of developing strategy by a construct of market-based and resource-based strategy development: "**We often have strategy meetings where we applied the inside-out and outside-in perspective** but (...) usually we said these are our competences and this is the market and we will do something, **but we never consciously asked ourselves: Does my firm adjust to the market or does the market adjust to my firm?** So I would like to go through these two perspectives with my business unit."	Extending experience by constructs
52	Means-ends (Simon, 1978)	The strategic marketing manager of a logistics company describes the extension of his experiences of by a new construct of the strategy process through means-ends: "(The main point is) the design of the process of strategy, it's about connections, about logic, it's partly about maths. Maths in the sense of action-reaction. This has a high practical value that I learn to contextualize and to evaluate in this sense. (...) **The point is that you realize that every strategic issue that you add will have a follow-up element. That is cause-and-effect. Often in strategy you think about an issue but then you stop and you don't think about the next steps.** So having this awareness that if you give a recommendation you should know what to get at and where does it lead to. It provides relational and consequential thinking."	Extending experience by constructs
64	Competitive strategy (Porter, 1997)	The CCO of pharmaceutical company describes that her experiences of having to provide media reports on positioning are extended by the scientific jargon of competitive strategy: "**Positioning in a market that's always a topic in my firm**. But it's not a topic that I directly influence. However, **now I know the right wording and how to articulate the positioning of our company**."	Extending experience by scientific framing
24	Strategic issue management (Ansoff, 1980)	The CEO of a logistics company states that his intuitive way of developing strategic issues was extended by a checklist: "**Mainly I acquired methodical knowledge, i.e. that I can methodically systematize, or standardize or industrialize strategic issues that I did before in a rather common sense way.** (…) you know exactly with what you start at day one, day two, day three for a strategy development; so it gives you a comprehensive checklist and prevents ignoring something."	Extending intuition by instruments
56	Competitive strategy (Porter, 1997)	The CEO of a hotel describes the extension of his intuitive understanding of strategy by a new construct: "Our strategy was more costumer centred, like which products are important, do we need a spa and what kind of spa etc. The take away for me is that **I always thought of strategy in terms of costumer relations but there are other factors, like suppliers and the whole environment and the location. I've learned to pay more attention to these factors** and that it would help to analyse the situation according to these factors (...)."	Extending intuition by construct

28	Competitive strategy (Porter, 1997)	A divisional director and president of the board of directors of an electric company states that his intuitive understanding of strategy was extended by a new construct: "**I always thought strategy is a really big thing but now I realized that I can change something on our local level and on a small scale.** We are in a relatively small industry, so we are not able to live it up."	Extending intuition by construct
76	Product-Market Matrix (Ansoff, 1965)	A marketing account manager refers to the product-market matrix in terms of "outside-in view" and "inside-out view", which provides a new construct of strategy and the related scientific wording of an inside-out perspective on strategy What I dislike in my firm is that we are too concerned about us instead of being concerned about the costumer. (...) Now I have a new perspective and now I can name what I dislike. (...) what I would like to raise in my firm is that inside-out is ok, but we also have to think about the environment. Thus, outside-in would be a necessary switch for us because new technologies change the behaviour of the consumer and this perspective, e.g., has not yet penetrated our work. It would change our products and services and still won't rest on this thinking that we can just differentiate through the quality of our services.	Extending by construct and scientific framing

Appendix 4

Supporting evidence for "Kinds of value"

No	**Concept**	**Exemplary quotes**	**Code**
2	Strategic issue management (Ansoff, 1980)	A marketing account manager of an insurance company states that the concept of strategic issue management improved the understanding of the strategy in her firm "**Overall I got a better understanding how a strategy is developed in our firm.**"	Improvement
50	Core competencies (Prahalad & Hamel, 1990)	The strategic marketing manager of a logistics company describes that his common sense understanding of core competences is improved "There is also another topic that I took away concerning e.g. what is distinctive? And that core competences rarely exist. Previously, everyone said "what is your core competence?", **but now I would question that and ask "do you really have a core competence" as this is something very, very rare and special.** So, you don't trifle with terms anymore."	Improvement

59	Incentive systems (Bebchuk & Fried, 2006)	The head of department of a car manufacturer describes that his sensitivity for the problem analysis is improved "Specifically, it was interesting for me to see what could be the problems or with what you have to be careful. (...) **That you get a kind of sensitivity again for the problem analysis** because if you're in the daily business you sometimes loose that."	Improvement
67	Strategic issue management (Ansoff, 1980)	A general manager of a business unit of car manufacturer describes that the way he handles strategic issues is improved "You're talking about things that are more or less intuitive and common sense but you're trying to get systematic about your insights and hopefully **this more methodical reflection you might get your strategic issues better done in a project**."	Improvement
74	Global strategy (Ghemawat, 2007)	The senior director of a nanotechnology company states that the concept of global strategy helped him improving formulating a business plan: "**So the concepts that we learn here have been very helpful actually already in formulating different approaches, having more robust well thought through approaches** as we start to form alliances with some of these very large, large companies."	Improvement
28	Competitive strategy (Porter, 1997)	A divisional director and president of the board of directors of an electric company states that he got a new understanding of strategy "I always thought strategy is a really big thing but **now I realized that I can change something on our local level and on a small scale**. We are in a relatively small industry, so we are not able to live it up. (…) **Now I know how we should develop our strategy**."	Innovation
32	Strategic issue management (Ansoff, 1980)	A consultant to a government states that he sees new ways of analyzing problem areas in his context "The concepts give me inputs (…) I think mostly it is the framework or the process how to develop a strategy, how to evaluate the reasons, why did it go wrong in this case and where are the problem areas. **So it would help me to go through the whole process and analyze our problem areas**."	Innovation
54	Competitive strategy (Porter, 1997)	A senior solution architect of a telecommunication company states that she has a new understanding of what the top management is doing and how they decide "Now I have an overall idea why they did it and why they took this direction of decision making. (…) **So the concept helped me seeing what the top management is doing and understand how they are thinking**."	Innovation
56	Competitive strategy (Porter, 1997)	The CEO of a hotel describes that he got a new way of analyzing the situation as well as new way of thinking in terms of strategy "The take away for me is that I always thought of strategy in terms of costumer relations but there are other factors, like suppliers and the whole environment and the location. **I've learned to pay more attention to these factors and that it would help to analyse the situation according to these factors.** (...) So basically I've got some analytic tools to open one's mind and to think differently that I can	Innovation

		imagine using in the future."	
51	Strategic issue management (Ansoff, 1980)	A HR director of a confectionery manufacturer describes that the concepts provides different, new courses of action to develop strategy "**The concept allowed me to realize that there is a wide range of looking into things**, not just the way it's done in my company (…) It's a good way of (...) putting everything together sometimes we (...) tend to look at this in a very isolated way."	Innovation
69	Market strategy (Geroski, 2003)	The CEO of a sugar cane factory describes a new course of action (the diversification to non-markets) based on the concept of market strategy "**But through this stack of insight (that I got through this concept), we began to diversify our attention to non-market**. Like, building relationship, which comes to Switzerland, some official bureaucrats and what part the media is going to play and the NGOs. (...) So I got another perspective (...)."	Innovation
35	Strategic issue management (Ansoff, 1980)	A HR director of a confectionery manufacturer describes that the concept of strategic issue management provides a structure that allows him explaining his courses of action "The concept helps you to develop a strategy in a very sequenced structure way. (…) **so that you can explain why you're doing things the way you're doing them all the time**."	Legitimation
9	Strategic issue management (Ansoff, 1980)	The CFO of an IT company describes that the concepts helps him to legitimize his procedure "**So the concept helps to ask the right questions and helps seeing whether I use the right tools and the right starting point or the right information**. So if you do strategy it's important not only to look at products but to ask where do I want to go overall and how is part of the strategy process."	Legitimation
5	Outside-in view on strategy (Ansoff, 1965; Porter, 1997),	The CEO of a federal police department states that there is a need to position the federal administration. This need is extended by the outside-in view on strategy, which provides a confirmation of the existing police department's strategic direction (...) in the federal administration we have to care much more about positioning. We still live from hand to mouth.(...) I have learned that we need a focus (...) especially in crime fighting; the question is "do we fight against the Italian organized criminality or against the Russian or the Chinese or do we fight against the motorcycle gangs?" (...) **so the concept confirmed my thinking**(...). I see that we are not that far away. Eventually, we have approached strategy differently but overall it was a confirmation of what we have planned so far.	Legitimation
15	Strategic issue management (Ansoff, 1980)	A chief physician of a hospital describes that he can justify the steps of a strategy process "I have learned how to structure a strategy process (with the GMN). (..) **That is, I can justify what are the steps in a strategy process.** That there is a framework that shows you clearly how to proceed but it's still not dogmatic."	Legitimation

29	Strategic issue management (Ansoff, 1980)	A marketing manager of an insurance company describes an improvement of her professional practices as well as a legitimation of her decisions towards others "I have worked in several strategy projects but I've never seen these steps and now I know what would be the ideal procedure. That doesn't mean that I will go exactly through all steps in detail in future projects but I bear this process in mind; and I know how I could move or should move, and with which tools; **and that helps me to better structure my work and also to better communicate or sell how I would like to realize my plan**."	Improvement/ Legitimation

Appendix 5

Supporting evidence for "Failures in the perception of relevance"

No	**Concept**	**Exemplary quotes**	**Code**
37	Procedural justice (Kim & Mauborgne, 1995)	A IT consultant describes that the concept of procedural justice does not allow for different kinds of actions as it assumes that people would sit together (face to face) to achieve commitment "(...) there are certain aspects that you also need to study, which is (...) technology, where it affects me, and other people at day to day basis. (...) and hence we should be focusing really on technological aspects of strategy. And by technological aspects I am not talking about software, I am not talking about hardware, I am talking about ways of thinking. **You know, how can we deal with a specific situation, where technology can probably assist you, jump three hurdles as opposed to face to face or whatever it is (...). The global climate, the fact that (...) strategy right now is not a single (...), face to face type environment like (...) groups sitting together in a meeting for an hour, I am sorry, that is not an option** (...)."	Not matching experience with strategy process
84	Foreign direct investment (Froot, 2008)	The managing director of a public broadcaster explains that the concept of foreign direct investment is not compatible with his organizational context "(…) **you can imagine that the concept "foreign direct investment" in a media house governed by public law is not really applicable, right**?"	Not matching contextual problems and needs

79	Value appropriation (Reitzig & Puranam, 2009)	The CEO of sugar cane factory states that he cannot relate the concept of value appropriation to his organizational context as it assumes a specific market structure that contradicts the emerging market structure, in which his company operates "(...) in the class everybody's been working for the last 15 or 20 years, there are many CEOs here and **they also said that some of the concepts can never be applied at work. (For example) a lot of emerging markets are structured (differently).** So you know, whilst we follow all this innovation with IP protection and stuff, you take it to some part of Asia and someone copies your design and that's it. You can go to the court and try and enforce your patent rights, but it will take you 10 years. So some things that you should be cautious about."	Not matching experience with structure of markets
6	Resource-based view (Barney, 1991)	A project manager at a business consultancy states that the concept of value creation does not provide new insights. For him, value creation is thus more a craftsmanship than an academic concept " (...) regarding some topics, I was really disappointed, e.g. when we talked about value creation. **In our firm we also do trainings how to create value and the concept provides exactly the same insights**. Actually, it's about usage, it's a craftsmanship."	Not extending
7	Strategic issue management (Ansoff, 1980)	A business unit manager of the army describes that the concept of issue management provides a process that can be matched to the own organizational strategy development process, but it does not provide additional insights, i.e. strategy development is more about experience and common sense than an academic concept "The concept enables you to match your own process to other possibilities to design the process and how it could be done differently, so it offers you possibilities to compare your own process with the scientifically or theoretically presented process. (...) **Generally I have realized that there is no difference between how we do strategy in our firm and what the concept describes.** (..) One of the most important things you learn is "it depends, it depends, it depends". (...) In strategy, you work a lot with the backpack (of experience) you already have. (...) **If someone has professional experience and uses his common sense, he wouldn't need the concept**."	Not extending
60	Outside-in view on strategy (Ansoff, 1965; Porter, 1997)	The head of the administration department of a hospital describes that because he already develop strategies he could not get new insights from the concept of positioning "(...) **I've already developed strategies, so I didn't learned new concepts that went beyond my current patterns to do strategy**. So the models, like positioning (...) weren't new to me (..). Although I think it's my job to apply some of the concepts myself, I expect that the model or concept provides something new and then it's my job to realize that in my own firm or to think about whether I can use this concept and to think about specifics about my particular situation."	Not extending

76	No specific	A patent attorney of a law firm states that generally academic concepts relate to common sense, which makes it difficult to get out something new "Some of the concepts (...) seem a little laboured. So I had a hard time taking apart common sense versus a theory. I felt like a lot (...) was common sense and was just kind of packed into a theory that you could apply (…). **Mostly it did not give me something new that I wouldn't have known before.**"	Not extending
23	Strategic issue management (Ansoff, 1980)	The CEO of an electric company states that if concepts provide many options it is difficult to decide which course of action should be taken "(...) the methods, like issue management (...) show that you have several options to be able to structure or formalize certain things. Because of that it's difficult to develop strategic issues as you have the feeling that we should actually go in this direction and in this direction. **So having these templates do not help deciding what I should do at the end**."	No value
8	Outside-in view on strategy (Ansoff, 1965; Porter, 1997)	A business unit manager of the army describes that the concept of positioning extends his experiences but it is not possible to make decisions or find solutions based on this model "(...) I've learned to proceed analytically if I'm concerned about the positioning e.g. but a synthesis of a possibilities is hardly possible. **So I'm struggling to make decisions based on this and find solutions**."	No value
25	Strategic issue management (Ansoff, 1980)	The CEO of a logistics company refers implicitly to the concept of issue management that extended his intuition by new causes of action to develop strategy. At the same time it does not provide a basis for decision making "I would have thought that in strategy there are more rules concerning do's and don'ts but I see that strategy work is very detailed and that you have to question everything a thousand times from different angles to get as many options as possible. **But then it's not clear how to make a right decision at the end. And I would be curious to know how you funnel the right decision from those options**."	No value
58	Outside-in view on strategy (Ansoff, 1965; Porter, 1997)	The head of the administration department of a hospital describes that the concept of positioning extended his experiences by a guide to position in the market, however it provides too many factors that influence positioning that it is hard to decide which courses of action to take "(...) the question "what kind of market is that", so the decision in which market the firm is operating was important for me (...). For example, is it e.g. good to build capacities and these fundamental tendencies.(...) You often hear that strategy is a difficult topic and which corporations have a good strategy or "my firm has a clear strategy or doesn't communicate it properly". And that shows that the topic is not as simple as assumed. **(So) deciding how to develop a strategy is rather difficult because a strategy is so complex and there are so many influencing factors**."	No value

66	Intended strategy (Mintzberg, 2003)	The owner and CEO of a pharmaceutical consultancy describes that the concept of intended strategy extended her experiences by a causal relation on strategy and goals. However, it is not considered as relevant because it does not provide an added value for her clients "The most important learning is (...) that if I don't know my goals I can't reach them, ergo I have to define a strategy with goals (...). (...) I thought, (...) instead of deducing something purely from practice, I could back this a little up theoretically (using this concept). However, you get very pragmatically in your daily business because the clients expect that. They don't pay to get theoretically instructed but to get something out for their business. Thus, I probably won't use this concept for my business."	No value
38	Strategic issue management (Ansoff, 1980)	A senior solution architect of a telecommunication company describes that the concept of issue management helps developing lists of different courses of actions but it does not provide a mechanism to make decisions "**I found it quite hard to make a decision relying on this procedure**. In other areas you have developed skills or improved the subject knowledge (…). Now I know how to develop a list, like one, two, three, four (...) to develop a strategy and once this is done, we develop another list. It's not like going back to the older list and then trying to improve it and change it for our beneficial. **In this sense, I still could find not something that can help me in the future**."	No value

Appendix 6

Number of instances of practitioners' accounts of all conditions

	Total number of instances	**102**
1a	Matching contextual problems and needs	26
1b	Matching experiences	33
1c	Matching intuition	17
	Total number of instances of matching	**76/102 (75%)**
5a	**Not matching**	**24/102 (25%)**
2a	Context expansiveness	18

2b	Action expansiveness	11
	Total number of instances of dimensions of ambiguity	**29/78 (37%)**
3a	Extending by instruments	40
3b	Extending by constructs	24
3c	Extending by scientific framing	7
	Total number of instances of extending*	**71/78**
	Total number of combinations of extending	16
5b	**Not extending**	**23/78 (30%)**
4a	Legitimation	23
4b	Improvement	21
4c	Innovation	22
	Total number of instances of value*	**66/71**
	Combinations	15
5c	**No value**	**20/71 (29%)**
	Total number of instances of failures of relevance perception	**67**

*Note that one instance can relate to multiple forms of extensions and kinds of value, and can thus be counted twice

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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Research

Violetta Splitter is a PhD student in organization theory and works as a research assistant at the Chair of Organization & Management (Prof. David Seidl, PhD) at the Department of Business Administration, University of Zurich. Her work has been published in *Organization*, the *Journal of Applied Behavioural Science* and the *Cambridge Handbook of Strategy as Practice*. Her research interests include open strategy, the transferability of management ideas and concepts, the practical relevance of management education and research as well as a Bourdieusian perspective on organizational phenomena.

Work experience and education

Violetta Splitter studied Business Administration in Munich and Brussels and earned a Diploma in Business Administration from the Ludwig-Maximilian-University, Germany. During her PhD studies she has been a visiting scholar at the Saïd Business School, University of Oxford and HEC Montréal, Canada. Prior to her PhD studies, Violetta Splitter has worked three years as an organizational development agent for FELD M in Munich, Germany.